Baccano Volume4

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About the three Gandor Brothers

ガンドール三兄弟のこと

マルティージョ・ファミリー・フィーロ・プロシュット&ロベルト

Words of Firo Prochainezo of the Martillo Family

Quite simply, those guys simply aren't Mafia boss material. I can say that for sure.

The oldest, Keith? Keith kinda seems like one, ish? But his thinking is a little dated. Sorta old-fashioned and straight-laced? He always persists in upholding justice and the like, see. Honestly, it'd be better if he were born in southern Italy or in the last century.

Then again, Keith's always been a much better person than me, and I respect him a lot as family.

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The second, Berga? This guy's an idiot. No matter how you put it, he's an idiot. A real endearing idiot, honestly.

Well, he isn't just a muscle-head. When the need arises, he won't hesitate to inspire 'terror' in people. If he was a little brighter , then he may really be able to control the organisation single-handedly.

But I still really hope that guy won't become that kind of 'villain '. …Well, he's already quite a villain now as it is.

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Last is the youngest, Luck, but… he's the least Mafia of the lot. Usually, he gives people the impression of being calm and

collected, but in reality he can't keep a cool head. He's probably aware he’s not cut out to be a Mafia, so he persists in playing the role of a ‘ruthless bastard’. But don't get me wrong, I don’t dislike him for that.

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Even now, I still think of them as brothers. Truth be told, they’re all good fellows at heart.

Yup, good men: just like the outlaws in movies. That’s the key reason why these three guys aren’t like the Mafia.

This isn't a fairy tale. ‘Cause we're in the unforgivably harsh, real world of New York.

About the Genoard Family

ジェノアード家のこと

住み込みの雇われバーテンダー&料理人曰く

「今度の現場は凄いもんだった。まるで幽霊屋敷に一度は泊まってみたいと思う様な古い古い古い

Words of the private sommelier and chef

“Our employer this time is really amazing, don't you think? It's just like a fairy tale. Even now, I still haven’t figured out whether or not we’re in some sort of movie or fairy tale.”

“But still, it's really saprising ah~”[1]

“Why?”

“Da Genoard family head is a girl like dat!”

“…True. Once we take that into account, it becomes even more like a fairy tale. Look at that mansion, Miss Genoard's estate. The average millionaire can’t compare. Inside lies a world we can never understand or imagine, really. For the girl, one of the upper echelons of society, to become the mistress of the house- it seems only natural, but at the same time unbelievable. It’s true, I really think so. It’s just like the ‘Snow White’ life that frequently appears in fairy tales.”

“That maybe a bit exaggerated.”

“Really? Then add in an elderly steward close to three score and ten years and a middle-aged maid, both of whom are very kind and congenial. To date, most of the rich people I’ve had contact with are very arrogant.”

“Dere hasn't been even a bit racism against an Asian like me.”

"Perhaps this is where those rich people have the advantage over us! Or they simply don't know what the lives of ordinary folk are like. Ah, never mind, this is just the humble, uninformed judgment of us poor people."

"But they don't need to act this way?"

"… True! They don't have to be good people. This is absolutely true. But this was precisely what I was worried about. Whether, because of her good nature, that young princess would be hurt by the ugliness of human nature."

"You think too much ah. That child's much stronger than we think!"

"Isn't she?… That child is definitely strong. A wealthy person, and once you take into account her good nature, she is strong."

"And very cute too! She will definitely become a real beaut in the future!"

"As beautiful as the princesses in fairy tales… Haha!"

About Roy Maddock

ロイ・マードックのこと

NY在住の医者・フレッド曰く

ロイがどんな奴か？　ふむ、世間的な評価を簡潔に述べるならば、まさしく「人間のクズ」と言う言葉がふさわしいのではないかな。

私は特に彼を憐みの対象とは感じないが、ドラッグに手を出した時点で、世間はそう判断せざるを得ないだろうな。だが、それが無かったとしても――彼が少し世間からずれた人間だというのは解る。

彼は昔から怪我や病気の絶えない男でね、この街の医者の間じゃちょっとした顔だよ。もっとも、その原因の大半は彼自身にあるんだが。

ロイは昔から無鉄砲な男だったらしい。後先というものを全く考えない。何と言ったら良いのか、寒いからと言って部屋の中で焚き火をするとか火事になって焼け死ぬ……そういう事が想像できない人間だ。逆石に今の例は極端すぎるがね。

彼は確かに普段からクズと呼ばれる種類の人物だが――自ら望んで堕落した道を進んでいるわけではないようだ。物事の善悪や損得の判断をつける前に行動してしまう、それだけの事だ。恐らく自己が確立できていないのだろう。常に周囲の環境に対して受動的に生きている……そんな気がしたよ。

まるで出来の悪い映画の登場人物の様に、彼の頭の中にはその時点での「場面」しかないのだろうな。過去も未来も存在しない。その瞬間だけ輝いていればいいというわけだ。

彼が今後立ち直れるか？　そんなのは私の知った「こと」ではないし、それに関しては特に興味も抱かない。

ただ――これは私の助手の受け売りだが――彼が映画の登場人物だとするならば、彼には唯一の「観客」であり「共演者」である恋人が居る。それを理解して彼女と向き合う事ができたのならば、その時あるいは――

Words of Fred, a doctor living in New York.

Just what kind of guy is Roy? Hmph, if we use the simplest way to describe him in human language, nothing suits him better than ' human reject'.

I'm not looking down on him, but when it's just one person who's taking drugs, society can't help but judge him in that way, right? But it isn't even that--- he's also a fellow who isn't in sync with society.

He's been assailed by illnesses and injuries ever since he was young, so he frequently rotates between the doctors around this area. But the majority of those injuries are self-inflicted.

Roy's been a reckless guy since early on, and never thinks about consequences of his actions. How should I put it? While shouting that it was cold, he lit a fire at home, resulting in a fire he almost died in… That's the kind of unimaginable person he is. I just hope that above example is an extreme case.

He definitely belongs to the category of people known as ' human scum'--- but it seems he still hasn't quite fallen into such a state. It's just that he frequently jumps into action before considering the rights and wrongs, pros and cons of things, that's all. I fear he's no longer capable of doing so. He's just a being that's often passively affected by his surroundings… I've always felt that way.

Like a character in a bad movie, his mind is fixated only on the ' scene' at that moment in time. The past and future don't exist there . Just that moment of glory is enough, that's how he is.

Can he still turn over a new leaf? That's not something I'm capable of knowing, nor is it something I'm interested about.

However, this is just what I heard from my helper— if we treat him as a character in a movie, then there must exist a lover who can become his only 'audience' and also 'co-actor'. If he meets this special person who can understand this, maybe then--

About the Runorata Family

Words of 'Vino', an assassin.

ルノラータ・ファミリーのこと

殺し屋「輔弼酒」曰く

「もしもし――何だ、ラックか。そっちから連絡を取ってくるなんて珍しいな。……いや、嬉しいよ。キースの兄貴遠も元気か？　そうか、それは何よりだ。

――あ？　ルノラータ？　ルノラータって、ニージェージーのルノラータ・ファミリーの事か？

――ああ、ある程度は知ってるよ。どんな奴らか？　そうだな……あの組織はまるで王国だ。バルトロ・ルノラータって男が一代で創り上げたな。あそこの組織の面子は実にバラエティに富んでやがる。それを纏めとめてるのは、バルトロ本人の統率力だ。単純に組織の力比べすりゃ、お前らはライオンの前の猫だよ。いや、寧ろネズミかな。

――たが時てよ、お前らと揉めてるって事は――NY進出を仕されてるグスターヴォか、ドラッグの開発と管理をしてるベグあたりか……いや、顔を見た事は無いが、ベグって奴に関しては噂だけは聞いてるよ。妙な話しかないんだけどよ。実は魔術師だの不老不死だのって類の……笑えるだろ、ハハ。

――で、そいつらがどうしたって？

――なるほど。話は解った。とにかく、俺が……特別急行の〈フライング・ブッシーフット〉がそっちに着くまで、何とか持ちこたえてくれ。そうすれば、俺えお前らの敵がライオンだろうが魔術師だろうが、俺が殲滅するネズミを匹、魔法の祭壇に乗せてやるよ。御伽噺の悪魔を相手にするには、御伽噺の英雄が必要だ。つまり俺だが。

安心しろ、御伽噺の英雄は必ず勝つ。だから――

――俺が行くまで、死ぬなよ」

"Hello--- oh, it's Luck? S'rare for ya to gimme a ring. … Nah, very happy. Are Keith and the others doing well? Really. Well, that's great.

--Hm? Runorata? Runorata, like the New Jersey Runorata Family?

--Yeah, I know them.

--What kinda guys are they? Hm… That organization's just like a kingdom, founded by the first-generation Baltoro Runorata. Truth is, there're constant conflicts between organizations in that area. Despite that, Baltoro and his excellent commanders are able to quench the fighting. In terms of pure organizational power, you're just like kittens before the lion. No, I should say- mice.

-- Wait, wait, this dispute of yours--- is it with Gustavo, who's assigned to enter the New York scene, or Begg, in charge of developing and managing drugs? …No, no, though I've never met him before, I've heard quite a few of rumors about that Begg guy. I heard he's actually a magician, moreover the immortal kind… Isn't it funny? Hahaha!

-- But how's that fellow?

-- I see. I understand. No matter what--- until I get there on the ' Flying Pussyfoot', you must fight on. Then, whether your enemy is a lion, or a magician---

-- I'll put the three mice I respect into the magical fortress. When you're fighting demons in fairy tales, you'll need the hero in fairy tales! In other words, me.

-- Relax, the hero in fairy tales will definitely triumph. So—

-- Until I arrive, you can't die!"

About The Informer

Words of Ronnie Suchiato, *'chiamatore'* of the Martillo Family

俺に一体何を聞こうと言うんだろう？　君達にとって有益な言葉を語れるとも思えないが……まあいい。

……情報屋？　信じていないのか？　まあいい。

ああ、DD前閣下らは強大な力を持っている。だからこそ、普段は世界に対して中立であろうとするのだろう。

ただし、彼らとて全能ではない。世界の全てを知っている者など存在しない。存在してはならない。存在しないからこそ「全能」と言う神がかりな言葉は存在を許されるのだから。

さっきも言ったが、彼らはこの世界の常識では全く非常識な存在だ。その分類は「万能」な知識を持っていると言えるだろう。全能に限りなく近い存在として彼らはこの世界のギリギリの所に踏みとどまっている。彼ら自身もそれ位でいないかもしれないな。

……何を言っているのか解らない？　だから言ったろう、俺が有益な言葉を紡ぐとは限らないと……まあいい。とにかく彼らとは必要以上に関わらないことだ。現実の中で、普通の生活を送りたいのならば尚更な。

情報屋のこと

マルティージョ・ファミリー『秘書』ロニー・スキアート曰く

Just what do you want to ask me? I won't say anything that'll be of use to you. --- Never mind.

-- The information shop? Aah, you mean the DD Newspaper?

Their existence is just like a kind of illusion.

From the viewpoint of ordinary people, people who know that of which little is known easily become the target of their respect and fear.

I also want to live for a couple more days--- but in this world, that information shop is truly 'another' existence. If they took a side, then they'd become walled up by their misconceptions, as though they had become the protagonist in fairy tales. … Why're you staring at me with that expression? You don't believe me? Ah, never mind.

If we take information to be a kind of power, then certainly, they hold very strong power. And it's precisely because of this that they normally take up a neutral stance in the world.

But they're not omniscient. There simply exists no person who possesses knowledge of everything in this world, nor can such a person exist. It's precisely because such a person doesn't exist, that there are people who theorize about 'omniscience'.

I already said just now- their existence in this world goes against common sense. Just this clearly shows that they hold ' omniscient' knowledge. Their reach has already spread to every

corner of the world. But it's possible that they haven't noticed it themselves.

-- You don't understand a single thing of what I'm saying? That's why I said earlier- I won't say anything that'll be of use to you. … Never mind. In any case, keep some distance from them. In the harsh, realistic society, it's better to live an ordinary life.

Prelude

前奏曲

December 1931 Western Manhattan Hell's Kitchen

That sound touched people's hearts profoundly like running water . In the clear morning sky, the dawn sunlight shone down on the city that was enveloped by a soothing melody. That sound almost made people feel a little lonely, a little melancholic. As though all sorrow was to end, as though greeting the new beginning of everything. Under the endless sky, in the still city, the air was stirred. The city blanketed by fog was dyed a single color.

Prologue

プロローグ

Begg

Early December 1931 Somewhere in New York

In the dark room, two men were waiting.

Their heartbeats were almost smothered by the silence, giving a feeling of extreme weakness.

“Please understand, Begg. Today will be the last time I’ll be meeting you as a ‘negotiator’.”

Without any warning, the tall man suddenly shattered the deadlock of silence. Once the words were spoken, the two’s surroundings regained the usual sounds, activity and color. As though verifying the passage of time, the tall man- Maiza Avaro drew in a deep breath.

“Begg, say something. Until you answer, I won’t leave. I need your answer to determine the degree to which you’ll be hurt.”

Staring at Maiza, who seemed troubled, the man called Begg finally opened his mouth. His vocal cords vibrating lowly, he stammered to Maiza,

“I, I, I understand. Ju-, ju-, just do, as you, say.”

Emptiness and anxiety were reflected in Begg’s eyes, and he was only standing by Maiza in his mind.

"From, from, from now on, I won't, e-, ever, dis-, dis-, distribute dr-, dr-, drugs on the Marti-, ti, tillo Family's te-, te, territory."

When he finished, a relieved expression surfaced belatedly on Maiza's face and he walked over to his old friend.

"Thank you, Begg! If that's the case, you aren't our enemy anymore."

In Maiza's expression, hints of sorrow were mixed in with his joy. After some moments of silence, he once again spoke to the man before him. But his tone no longer possessed the coldness of civility, thawed by the trace, caring concern for an old friend.

"Here onwards I speak not as an executive of the Martillo Family, but just as your old friend—Begg, if possible, don't distribute your drugs on the market an—"

"C-, c-, can't. Th-, that's my li-livelihood."

"Begg!"

"A-, a-, as an apothecary, I had to push past, all frontiers, to become an alchemist. My dreams, my wishes, my missions, ev-, everything was going to succeed. Using two centuries, finally, finally, finally, I'll achieve it. Humans, to make humans, become more fortunate, the method, of doing so."

Hearing this, Maiza gave a light shake of his head.

"How can you still say this? That kind of thing doesn't exist."

"It, it does. I, I, only, wanted, to make humans, become the ruler , of the world, that, was all. Wanted to create, a world, with only, one person, that's all. To that person, creation, is the highest, order of, the world. If this state were to, continue on, forever, and ever, people, humans, people, will laugh, even as they die."

"In that case, isn't that annihilating the human race? Until they die, while humans medicate themselves into a stupor of their own fantasies, no offspring will be produced and they wouldn't intake any food either."

"Of, of course, but, that is just, the first, stage. I, I, I will also, create a drug, to let, people, to awaken, at any time, and afterwards, continue their dreams. The drug, will not harm, the body, but only, make people, feel, happy."

Hearing Begg's childlike narration of his 'dream', Maiza heaved a sigh.

"Your soul is already worn out. Why do you still not understand?"

"Ha, ha, ha. You too. Do men, even have, to believe, in souls and other, unscientific, things?"

"Regardless, now is not the time for a discussion about the scientific nature of things. Isn't it obvious? We, who have made a contract with the demon and ultimately became immortal."

'Immortal'. This extremely well-worn word was a shackle that forever bound these two people together. The power of

immortality obtained from the contract with the demon, and--- the curse of 'eating and being eaten'.

They were able use their right hand to 'eat' the other party.

And by doing so, they would completely consume and assimilate the other party, down to their knowledge, past and experiences. This was a curse of misfortune, much like how a cup of poison would not stand untouched.

Having heard Maiza's speech, Begg fell into a contemplative silence.

"Humans, seeking, happiness, it's an instinct, is it not? I, just, wanted, to raise it, to a higher, level."

"Any happiness that surpasses human instinct will always be brought to ruin. Please don't forget this one fact."

With that, Maiza turned to leave the room.

"Thank, thank, thank you, Maiza. Thank you, for not, eating me ."

"…… If you say that again next time, I'll become upset."

After Maiza left the room, Begg slipped the needle of the syringe into his own wrist.

Although this was a drug many times purer than what was on the market, it didn't have any effect on him any more.

For he who lives an eternal life, his heart had already gained a resistance that far surpassed the effects of the drug.

He could no longer experience the happiness he was yearning for.

He was passing on the task he could never realize to others.

But even doing so was meaningless.

The Gandor Family

"Honestly, just how did the world become so tumultuous?"

In contrast to this man's words, New York was brimming with a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere.

The sun hanging in the sky shone down warmly on the red-bricked alleyway.

The corner of Manhattan, far away from the towering skyscrapers. Within an old bookstore surrounded by dilapidated offices, a young man once again paced towards the shopkeeper.

"Don't you think so? Not only will this recession continue, but on top of that we have to deal with these ever-changing governmental decrees that end up not changing anything in the

slightest. Look around us- the only result is that the economic condition and security are worsening by the day. Under these kinds of circumstances, can you still operate here without any worries?"

"Ah, thanks to you, my small store can still get by."

As the shopkeeper spoke, he bowed his head to this young man, who was around the same age as his son. Although his motions and tone of voice were very humble, there was a subtle hint of something else in his eyes.

"Is that so? But very few customers come here… If there's anything I can help you with, please, feel free to tell me."

"I can't do that! Also, we haven't paid the protection fee, so if we trouble you any further…"

"Even if we don't receive this store's protection fee, we won't close you down. If anything, we'd amass some cash to pay for your living expenses. After all, you've taken good care of us!"

"Please don't say that! It's only because of the Gandor Family that my business could succeed, so you don't have to concern yourself with us."

This young man had expected such a reply from early on. Once something like that was said, no one would dream of saying ' please give us money' outright anymore.

The Gandor Family. In this melting pot of a city that was Manhattan, it was a tiny, tiny organization occupying a very small area. Although their territory wasn't large, it was no exaggeration to say that it had very far-reaching influence.

At first, their territory wasn't even half of what they had today, but ever since the founder passed on his seat to his three sons, it rapidly expanded outwards. They used the tried-and-tested methods of the threatening and cajoling residents while maintaining peace, and avoiding unnecessary contact with other organizations insofar as was possible. They absolutely refused to accept cease-fire agreements, protection or constraints by other organizations, and persisted in walking down their own path.

Of course, to that end, they had committed countless unimaginable atrocities, just like other organizations running on similar models of operation.

So, for this man, one of the leaders of this group, to actually say something like 'the world has become tumultuous' now was a joke . As the shopkeeper thought that deep in his heart, he smiled as he gazed at the youngest of the three brothers- Luck Gandor.

At first glance, his smile was extremely friendly, but that was just on the surface. The faint smile in those eyes created an indescribable feeling of fear in the shopkeeper's heart.

As though trying to break free from the grip of terror, the shopkeeper quickly said,

"Ha, haha, aah, that's how things are. I think the Gandor Family must be doing very well!"

"No, no, not at all. We've got our own troubles."

Hearing the shopkeeper's words, this young leader shook his head, sharing the organisation's worries with him. Whether or not slight changes in the small details could win the residents' hearts was critical.

Of course, they wouldn't reveal their true weaknesses. In these situations, many of those who controlled ordinary people behind the scenes would act as though their weakness was that they were 'helpless before residents'. As such, what gave them headaches were those operating legitimate businesses who played dumb.

"I mean, even we have time when we can't show our faces for shame. For example, with this 'drug' incident."

"Drugs… That's just because some young people smuggled it in !"

"But it's still around."

The Gandor Family never dealt in drugs. This was also the reason why most people trusted them, but that wasn't the complete truth. It was just that they didn't have enough power to become involved in drug trade, so there were no guarantees they wouldn't enter the drug market once they had gathered enough power. Although Luck had always thought that way, in the end, a lack of power was a lack of power. Luck personally felt that

avoiding the unfamiliar to prevent a loss of confidence was for the better. Furthermore, it was once again the boom of a drug era and the Gandor Family didn't want to involve the residents in this. But this was only a temporary measure for now.

-- Brother Berga seemed to have never considered the potential gains from drugs, while Brother Keith has always loathed drugs to the very core.

At that moment, the two faces of the second-in-command, Berga , and of the boss, Keith, surfaced in Luck's mind.

If one had to clearly divide the three brothers' fields of work, then Keith's would be the 'shield' and Berga's would be 'terror'. As for Luck, his was 'strategy'. To those around them… especially to those in legal professions, that was how things seemed.

The eldest, Keith. Rather than just a sense of righteousness, it would be more accurate to say he possessed a pride in protecting these residents. So, for this reason, Keith would never cross the line of life and death of innocent people. It was also clear proof that the probability of the Gandor Family dealing in drugs was infinitesimally small.

However, signs of disturbances were appearing in the areas under their jurisdiction, exploiting the vacuum in their management.

Recently, a new 'drug' had started circulating around the area. Although as of now it hadn't caused any big disturbances, news about that drug had leaked out. Immediately the next day, the Gandor headquarters received the actual good.

With the situation out in the open, they couldn't leave the matter alone anymore.

No matter what, they had to find the source of the drug and bring an end to this incident.

Luck's fox-like eyes narrowed further, and the darkness in his heart started to well up.

"Oh? Isn't this the script of an opera? That's rare."

Luck held up a worn book. For an instant, the shopkeeper's expression changed, but he immediately put on a smile again.

"Ah, if you like it, then I'll give it to you!"

"I can't accept that."

Pushing the thoughts of the drug to the back of his mind, Luck took out a thick wallet from his breast pocket. Just as he was about to take some bills out from the wallet, his hand suddenly stopped.

"Ah."

Just as suddenly, a strange groan sounded from behind Luck.

"?"

When he turned to see what was going on, a cold knife sliced across his throat.

"Nnn…"

By the time Luck felt the searing heat and agony of metal severing flesh, blood was already everywhere. His vision was drowned by the same shade of crimson.

"Ah!?"

Bam. When he saw Luck sprawled on the floor, the shopkeeper finally understood what was happening before his eyes.

Across from where blood was spraying into the air, a single man stood on the sun-lit street. It was a middle-aged man wearing ragged clothing, whose body trembled sporadically and whose complexion didn't look very healthy. In his hand was a knife, and his eyes were wide open.

"M-, m-, murdeerrrr!"

The shopkeeper, shocked by the sudden murder, collapsed onto the floor and didn't move.

"I've been seen ki- ki- ki- killed must ki-ki-ki-ki-kill the witness I've been seen been seen been seen ki-ki-killed Luck in the bookstore kill kill kill kill kill kill kill…"

The middle-aged man who had completely lost his senses slurred his words, and his wits were even more scrambled.

"Uooooooh!"

The huge knife was raised over the shopkeeper's head. And on the blade of the knife--- there wasn't any blood from Luck's cut throat.

Gichiiiiiiiiiii gichi gichiiiiiiii…

The gleaming knife in the man's hand swung down in a bright arc, making a strange, almost instrumental noise.

With a *slash*, the knife halted right before the shopkeeper's eyes.

"…"

The shopkeeper nervously opened his eyes, and saw the man before him struck in his temple by the corner of a book. And the one holding the hardcover book was the man whose throat should have already been slit just now.

"Are you all right?"

The instant he finished his question, the middle-aged man wielding the knife swayed and crumpled at the door of the bookstore.

There wasn't a trace of a wound on Luck's throat, and the blood that should have been splattered across the book was gone.

"H-, h-, huh? Mr. Luck, Mr. Luck, just now, what? Just?"

Luck ignored the befuddled shopkeeper and took up a red magazine, as though nothing had happened. Then, he shredded the cover of the magazine as he gave the shopkeeper an icy smile, saying,

"My, my. That was dangerous! If not for the timely rescue by this book, I'd probably have just died."

"Uh, but, that, no, blood…"

"It was the cover of this book scattering everywhere- you've been mistaken. After all, it was too sudden."

"But…"

Faced with the relentless questioning by the shopkeeper, Luck tossed the scraps of the torn cover into the air.

"Ah, I ought to pay you back for this book."

He hadn't finished speaking and a thick wad of notes were already shoved into the shopkeeper's hand. Forget repaying the book- this princely sum was almost equal to a month's revenue of the bookstore.

"N-, no! I can't take your money…"

Luck disregarded the shopkeeper's refusal, and plucked out another wad of cash and stuffed it into the shopkeeper's hand, repeating in a warning tone of voice,

"What that bastard cut just now was this book. Do you understand?"

With those words, the shopkeeper didn't retort anymore and just silently nodded.

"Very good. Only those who understand the times can stand out. The smart alone will succeed in business. Keep up the good work!"

That said, Luck turned his back on the shopkeeper and hauled the middle-aged man with a collapsed temple onto his shoulder. This scene looked extremely unbalanced, just like an ant carrying a beetle corpse. Finally, he gave the shopkeeper a light wave of a hand, saying,

"Honestly, just how did the world become so tumultuous. Right ?"

The Wealthy

October 1930 Somewhere in western New Jersey

In the beginning, there were two strange thieves.

That day, Eve Genoard was very anxious.

As the daughter of the local millionaire and born with a silver spoon in her mouth, she was a young girl of only 15 years of age. This was everything about her, and she had no other special characteristics.

A few days ago, her grandfather, the head of the house, had passed away, plunging the Genoard family into chaos. The sudden death of her genial grandfather saddened Eve immensely, but her anxiety was due to a completely different reason. It was about her brother who had rushed back from New York, Dallas Genoard.

This brother treated Eve very kindly, but Eve didn't think well of him in the slightest. Because when he was around people other than Eve, Dallas acted like a complete 'hoodlum'.

When he had just arrived back home, there was a complete absence of grief for his grandfather's death. For some reason Eve couldn't quite put her finger on it; there was a feeling that he was plotting something sinister in his heart.

As though he wanted to murder someone after this----

In the early days of America's economic boom, industries expanded like wildfire across the state. It was during this period that their grandfather amassed a huge quantity of wealth. Exactly what kind of industry would prosper in this small, rural town, far away from the state capital, New York City(!)? Eve had only ever heard of 'factory operations' and wasn't interested in the other areas. This was the sizeable factory in the depths of the forest, but since her grandfather and father never let Eve get close, she had never visited the place. So what kind of businesses did her family run, what kinds of products were produced- she didn't know a single thing.

But she understood why other people described her family as ' wealthy'. And, she also understood that money could corrupt people's hearts.

In her frequent appearances in various social events, she had had contact with every type of person out there- those who would do anything to get money, those whose greed was unrivalled, those who were manipulated by others, and even those who treated money like dirt. There were those with countless facades, and also those who had gone mad.

Such experiences have led her to realize two things:

First, the sum of her grandfather's inheritance was enough to die for.

Secondly, her older brother, Dallas, would definitely join in the dispute over the inheritance.

But even under these circumstances, she was powerless. If this continued, what she sought to protect would one day collapse around her.

Fear of the impending tragedy, anger at her weak, helpless self. To Eve, who was conflicted by the turmoil in her heart, the pressure of these two feelings was almost suffocating.

Whenever she was distressed about these matters, she would automatically pray to God.

(Please, let there be a miracle.)

-- She just wanted to be freed from her worries, that was all.

With that one wish in life, she hid under her blankets, praying endlessly to God.

Then, a miracle suddenly happened.

Late at night, the entire mansion was shrouded in darkness and silence. Suddenly, two people broke into her room.

Eve didn't even have time to scream. She stared at the duo with wide eyes.

After the door was slowly opened, a man and a woman dressed as native Indians appeared.

An animal skin was draped across the man's torso, and on the lower half of his body he wore thick, burlap trousers. The woman was also dressed in a matching Indian outfit. There were even strings of beads on their clothing, which formed colorful pictures. Daubed on their faces were Indian paints, and on their heads were large feather headdresses. But unbelievably, these two were actually white people. If this wasn't the case, Eve would probably have screamed out loud long ago.

Facing Eve, who didn't understand what was going on, the couple spoke as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened:

"Hey! Keep quiet! We're not bad guys."

"Just for a moment, let us hide here for just a moment."

They carried on their backs what looked like Santa Claus's sack, and a few bills were protruding from the opening. Judging from the way the sack bulged and dipped, at the bottom of the sack were probably gems and ornamental-type items- with just one look, anyone could tell what they were doing.

Thieves. Although this answer sprung to mind, Eve didn't scream or panic. She didn't know why, although it was probably because--- those two were staring at her innocently.

"Ah! It can't be, a Genoard!"

"The young mistress with a silver spoon in her mouth!"

On hearing their whispered conversation, Eve's feelings of anxiety instantly awoke.

Did they want to take me hostage? But, that worry was immediately shattered. What the two Indians said next was completely beyond her expectations— or to be more accurate, what they said was the complete opposite of what Eve imagined.

"Great! Now we can relax!"

"Great!"

She didn't understand. While Eve's thoughts were scrambled, the two said light-heartedly,

"We will take away all your misfortunes!"

"This way, there won't be any internal disputes!"

"Peace and harmony in the family is the most important!"

"You'll definitely become happy!"

Just as if it were their own, these two were happy for the good fortunes of a girl they had met only for the first time. Finally, the meaning of what those two had said sunk in.

If there was no inheritance, there would be no disputes. If the money was gone, people's hearts would not be twisted. What these two were doing, was it not fulfilling her wish?

What a ridiculous, absurd theory. If this was heard by anyone else other than Eve, these two would have already been beaten to the ground. Eve instead wanted to thank them. After praying to God, her own 'life-long wish' was going to come true.

Aah, these two had to be emissaries sent from Heaven.

The Genoard family never really believed in God, so Eve's impression of God and angels were very vague.

Eve didn't care about the two's Indian outfits anymore, and suddenly knelt before the couple.

"Hey, hey, Miria. Why is she kneeling in front of us?"

"I don't know, but if someone worships us then we ought to give them something!"

"Um… Originally I was thinking of performing the Snake Dance, but that takes more than ten days and requires over 50 snakes. Also, I'm not a priest, so if I really did do something like that, I would definitely anger the spirits."

"Then, let's do the Butterfly Dance! The one the children from Hopi tribe taught us!"

"Yes, let's do that!"

The two exchanged light nods and started dancing the Hopi ritual dance. There was no music or song, just the two people dancing, so it was rather comical. Nevertheless, Eve watched them very seriously.

"Miss! Miss Eve!"

The two's dance was interrupted by the knocking on the door from outside.

"Thieves appear to have broken in! Is everything all right?"

-- Oh no, quick, hide--

Just as Eve was about to tell the two to hide, they were nowhere to be seen. Except that, the large French windows were open and swaying in the breeze.

-- Aah, they must have flown back to heaven.

As though she had just awoken from a dream, the girl looked out of the window. Other than the trees, there was no sign of Indians to be seen anywhere.

The next day, Dallas came to Eve's room, worn and haggard. Although he had a testy expression, once he saw his younger sister , a faint smile immediately surfaced on his face. The sincere smile on her brother's face was one Eve hadn't seen in a number of years .

"It's been a while. Want me to teach you a little billiards, Eve?"

Eve was so touched she almost cried, and nodded her head with a radiant smile on her face.

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After that, just as the two thieves said, every day was filled with happiness.

But, one year later—their happiness was shattered, just like that.

December 1931 Same residence

What shattered her life of happiness was sudden loneliness.

Her father, Raymond, and his eldest son, Jeffrey. They had taken over grandfather's businesses and became the core of the family. But ever since they left to Manhattan for work, they never came back. No, to be precise, they did return, but once she saw the two deformed bodies, Eve simply couldn't believe what was before her eyes were her own relatives.

They were bodies discovered in a car that had fallen into New York Bay. The police didn't say whether it was a murder or an accident, only that further investigations were taking place.

And the other piece of news was that her other brother, Dallas, had disappeared.

Her mother had passed away early on, before grandfather died, and so the only person left in the entire Genoard family was Eve

alone. All the servants had gradually resigned and left, and the entire estate became quiet, like an abandoned ruin.

Management of the Genoard-run 'businesses' had also been handed over to key factory staff. They paid Eve royalties, but this was only in name. In reality, the only assets remaining to the family were just land and this estate. No one was going to inherit this massive family business, and now there were just an old steward and a black servant left.

"Ooh, my! Miz, yer really wanna go?"

The fat, black servant asked worriedly as she looked at Eve, who had made up her mind.

As a servant, she--- Samasa, had traveled across the entire country quite a few times to date so she spoke many dialects, making communication very difficult.

"Yes, I've decided."

From a very young age, Eve had grown up under Samasa's care and so she didn't have a single racist sentiment.

"Miss, though I am old, my good-for nothing self can still lead the way."

"Mr. Benjamin, is it really all right?"

"Miss, you don't have to be so courteous with me. Taking care of you is one of my responsibilities and also part of my profession. The only wish of this set of old bones is to see you grow up healthily."

Speaking reverently and respectfully was the German steward, who had been serving the Genoard family since the previous generation. He was always a very gentle, dignified old man, but today he showed uncharacteristic resolution and resilience.

Seeing the resolute steward, Samasa smiled as she thumped her own chest.

"Miz, dun worry. No ma'er wut happenz, 'm alwayz by yer side."

Accompanied by the two long-time servants, Eve set off on the journey to the city she had never seen before, Manhattan.

To look for her missing brother, Dallas Genoard.

The Drug Addict

Ahh, feels good, so good, great!

There were no other words that could describe this kind of feeling.

Or perhaps there were, but I didn't want to think, nor was there any need to.

Everything I needed was here. The deep recesses of my brain held all that I desired.

Before my eyes, everything melded together. Aah, the sky and earth, people and streets, day and night- everything merged into one. I had really come to paradise. My fingers, wrists, feet, waist, head, chest, bones, heart, everything around me all fused into one point, everything I saw focused on my own body. The me right now was the only thing that existed in this world.

Then, even my eyes started to merge. Aah, I could see every corner of the world.

I could feel the world that had combined with me. This was an extremely, extremely peaceful feeling.

Without noticing, I was already completely merged with the world.

"…… R-, Roy……"

Cracks started to appear in the world.

Who? Who was trying to destroy my world? Stop, stop! Was it a problem with my eyes? Vision returned to its original state. Aah, my body, my body has already started to part from this world. Stopstopstopstopstopstopstopstopstopstopstop……

"Roy…… Roy…"

My entire body started coalescing in mid-air, and with that the descent into the chaotic world began. With the sound of howling wind, the entire world started to fragment. The sky and earth, people and streets, day and night, they all split into individual units. My dreams and reality separated, then there was only reality , falling towards the floor.

"Roy!"

Then, my body hit the floor, shattering.

Staring blankly at the skylights was a man— Roy. His body suddenly convulsed, then leapt up from the bed like a spring, glaring at his surroundings. In his field of vision, he could just about make out the figures of several men and women seated around him, all looking at him with the same expressions of confusion.

"Roy, pull yourself together!"

There was a woman calling out quietly.

-- This woman seemed to be… Aah, it's my girlfriend, Edith.

Then, he instantly understood. It was her who had called him back into 'this world'. Roy didn't look at her and just rolled over, grumbling irritably.

"What's with this attitude! I was worried you wouldn't make it back this time--"

Edith's rebuking tone of voice thundered in Roy's head. It pierced through his cerebrum and went straight down his spine, triggering spasms of shaking.

"Didn't you promise? To quit your drug addiction! So why're you here again?"

As though he had injured his neck during the earlier journey, sporadic attacks of dull pain assaulted his neck. Roy's consciousness was now fully awake and he also 'understood' he had already returned to reality.

Urgh---

At the same time, he threw up what had been churning around in his stomach.

The cement floor was showered with colorless vomit. But Edith just frowned a little and didn't call for anyone. This was not a

side-effect of the drug itself but just the fear and anger from the rude awakening to reality, which had momentarily seized hold of his digestive system.

There was a reason why the floor in this room was simply just cement. Vomiting and incontinence was a daily occurrence in this place. To make cleaning as easy as possible, no decorations had been put up. That was to say, the purpose of this place was--- a studio especially prepared for the intake of certain 'drugs'.

After emptying his stomach onto the space beside him, Roy said hollowly,

"Dunno, I never knew about that promise thing, don't talk to me about such real things."

"Cut out the jokes! Didn't you say you wanted to turn over a new leaf?… So what happened this time?"

So he could answer this question, Roy reached out and took a bag of powdered drug.

"Don't worry. Recently, several new drugs have popped up around this area. S'different from weed and cocaine, the newest out there, so it hasn't been banned yet, so it's not really illegal per se. There shouldn't be any problem then?"

"That's not what this is about! If you, continue there'll only be death waiting for you! You, d'you know how dreadful you look right now? Just like some beached octopus or squid! At least open your eyes and take a look at the people around you!"

Not wanting to be lectured any further, Roy raised his voice.

"No matter what, I'll never insult my friends. Don't you also drink with others in bars? That's illegal too."

Hearing this, Edith did a little double take, then fell into a seething silence.

"What, gonna go run and cry to your employers, your Gandor pals? No? Sadly, the Gandors have forbidden any contact with drugs. And also, with what their rivals, the Runorata Family, have gotten their hands on! I noticed it long ago that you kept quiet about this kind of stuff. I might be killed by the Gandors, but you too—"

At this point, Roy suddenly stopped. He saw the large, large drops of tears spilling from Edith's eyes.

"I don't care what happens to me, but—I don't want to just watch you die! But I've had enough! If you refuse to come to your senses, just go to hell!"

With that, Edith turned and ran out.

Bam-- with a loud slam of the door, Roy's expression started to crumble.

"Eh? What, what did, did I just say? Why'd she run out crying? No, I, that's right, I didn't keep my promise, I should apologize to her. No, I, eh, what's this?"

On reflecting on his own actions, grief and pain welled up in Roy's heart.

"Wait, wait! It's my fault! I was wrong! Why did she have to cry ? No! I'm the one who should be crying. How strange. Eh! Wait, waitwaitwait. Wait! Why're you not here, why, wait, come back! I was wrong, it's my fault…"

As Roy mumbled to himself, he started weeping.

"Wait… wait. I can't not apologize…"

Seeing him in this state, a man and a woman in the corner of the room whispered to each other.

"Bastard, that woman should have dumped him long ago!"

"Eh? Heh, this kind of argument is just superficial for those two. "

The two looked at Roy, who was temporarily free from the effect of drugs and had regained his wits.

"But what that woman said wasn't totally correct either."

"What?"

"Even if he escaped the Gandors' notice, that Roy guy would still die. Think about it, how many of those who were caught and made to kneel before the Gandors survived?" **(!)**

"So death's inevitable, huh? But to say that the drug has no side effects on the human body…"

"It's all the Runorata's fault! If it were true, it's the same as having the Grim Reaper to descend into one's body, and there'd be no way of escaping… The first time that guy inhaled cocaine, he started scrabbling at his head- it's not a normal reaction. He's too sensitive to drugs. I suppose you don't know that people new to cocaine won't run around wildly, but just want to throw up. It's only after the next few shots that they get used to it- that kind of phenomenon would never happen the first time. But this guy had such a large reaction on just his first batch- it's really bizarre."

Roy drew a little bag from his breast pocket, and took out several satchels of powdered drug from within.

"After he got admitted into the hospital, Edith's been desperately trying to persuade him to quit. Ah, he'd already cut his drug addiction in the beginning, but he got ahold of the drugs those Runorata bastards were distributing again. They said 'this drug has no harmful side effects whatsoever' and such nonsense, and so like an idiot, he was tricked by these lies. As if such good things exist!"

Roy started talking as he opened the satchel.

"Ah, I know I shouldn't touch this kind of stuff, but still I'm an idiot who can't pull himself free. Basically, all drug addicts are idiots. But that doesn't matter, haha, not at all… That's right. Ehe, hahaha!"

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Aah, I had to apologize to Edith.

First, I needed to leave this place, then say it when I see her.

This time, I'd definitely overcome my addiction this time. This way, she'd definitely forgive me. No matter what, this would be the last satchel of the so-called new stimulant. Although the crash was very painful, but it was tolerable without the actual drug itself .

So, so this had to be the last time. I had to treasure it well. It was my last, hard to come by dose, so I must soar.

Seemed like I had thought the same thing when I made a promise with Edith in the past, but during that time my willpower must've been really weak. But that was in the past and I have already matured. This would definitely be the last time.

Aah, it was coming coming coming coming, so great, so fantastic, my right half of my brain was opening and closing. Ahh — looked like it split, I could see rainbows. Oh! My God! Was this, was this me? Was this my body moving right now? Was this functioning brain mine? Amazing, right now I was invincible. The me right now had already surpassed myself. My brain was evolving. My consciousness had already flown into the future.

Unbelievable, simply unbelievable! To be so miraculous, I was too amazing!

I could, I could! Right now, I was invincible.

Invincibleinvincibleinvincibleinvincibleinvincibleinvincible invincible invincible invincible invincible invincible invincible invincible invincible invincible-------

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I opened my eyes.

Looked like I'd come back home unawares, and before my eyes was a familiar sight.

My head hurt. Cold. So cold. Coming. Oh no, the high was going to pass.

Intense unease and irritation was born deep in my heart, and nausea gushed up.

Suddenly, the entire world became terrifying. This feeling grew stronger and stronger, as if the Gandor people would rush in and kill me the moment I opened the door.

A sniper's gun was aimed right at my forehead.

Their men were hiding under my bed.

Maybe before this, every other human besides me was already dead. Then there won't be any sound in the room just now. What? Perhaps before I had woken up, the Martians had attacked Earth and wiped out all humanity.

At this very moment, those Gandor bastards were probably dancing with those octopus monsters outside. Or maybe they were even discussing how to eliminate me this very instant.

I'd definitely be shot dead, burnt to a crisp, drowned by those Gandors and sunk to the bottom of the ocean, then tortured, maimed, killed, violated, eaten, exposed by those octopus Martians living at the bottom of the ocean—no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-nooooooooooooo no no no no no no no no no no no no no nooooo n-n-n-n-nooooooooooooooo----------

Calm down! Myself! These had to be hallucinations, delusions. I understood. But even if I knew these were hallucinations, they were still extremely terrifying. Maybe these weren't hallucinations or delusions, but reality, and that there were really people behind that door… no! Don't think! Don't think any further! I lost! I was gonna die! Damn! If I still had the drug, if I still had that drug just now! Again, give me that drug again, so there won't be the hallucinations like now! Drug, give me the drug! Someone, quick, go to the Runorata family and help me buy the druuuuuuuuug! Otherwise, otherwise I'd die. Quick, quick, someone help me! Edith, Edith, Ediiiiiiiiiiiiith……

Seven hours later, Roy ended up regaining consciousness in the bathtub in his house. He was stark naked, standing on a floor covered with his own vomit. He had long expected something like this to happen, so he purposely rented an apartment with a bathroom. And what a wise move it was too! To enter the bathroom while he had not yet fully lost his wits. He was truly thankful of himself.

Because this was the first time he had taken it, so after all the effects of the drug had passed, his body felt comfortable. However, normally, he also intook other drugs so there was a strange feeling. No matter what he said, his behavior right now was simply a case of initial rebound. From a medical point of view, these after-effects may very well be due to this new drug. Roy was clueless about the particulars: the only thing he knew was that there was an instant of ecstasy in the beginning, and the kind of terror that came after the high died down.

He had to apologize to Edith. Her devotion was what enabled him to break free from terror. But in the end, he succumbed at the very last moment and took the drugs, and was once again granted release from terror. Roy was such a remarkably mercurial person.

Roy washed himself and the bathroom, feeling a small sense of accomplishment. This time, this time he would definitely abide by Edith's promise. He seemed to have also experienced this kind of feeling in the past, but he was probably just remembering wrongly .

After a shower, Roy changed into a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, and sang as he walked into his bedroom--- but his body was still twinging with faint pangs of pain. Was he hungry? Or was it a side effect of the drug?

Then, his footsteps suddenly stopped.

-- What was that big case?

Under the table was a case he had never seen before. A large, leather briefcase that bulged, like it was filled with something.

He seemed to have seen it somewhere before, but he was simply unable to recall when or where. He really didn't want to use his brain to remember.

The lost terror was reawoken. His heart overtook his brain, and started thudding faster.

Nervously, hesitantly, he approached, and carefully opened the briefcase---

Everything flooded back, and Roy was so shocked his heart skipped a few beats. Inside the suitcase, filled to the brim, were paper packets of the powdered drug. This was what the Runorata Family sold, what had just revived him from the dead- the newest drug. The Grim Reaper lodging in his body raised its scythe and swung it at him in one ponderous move.

The Runorata Family

New Jersey An estate on the outskirts of New York

“And?”

Standing by an extravagant table, a man asked.

He seemed to be in his fifties, his wrinkles deep and shallow, but set on the stern face was a pair of intellectual-looking glasses.

No emotion whatsoever could be inferred from his expression or tone of voice, but the expressions of the group of suited people around him froze.

“The new drug was taken and you let them escape, am I right?”

All the people in the house didn’t even dare to breathe heavily when confronted by this elderly man who was stating the facts at a measured pace.

Then, just like a death-row criminal on the bench waiting for his sentence, one man waited for his own boss, Bartolo Runorata, to cont-

Bartolo spoke. After drawing a very long breath, Bartolo slowly opened his eyes, saying,

"And?"

Faced with Bartolo’s question, that large man answered shakily, sweating all the while,

“G-gather all the men. That guy, we'll definitely--”

"No, what I wanted to ask was--"

Interrupting him, Bartolo said quietly,

"Is it of any benefit to you and me— or to the organization, reporting such small matters like these to me everyday?"

Although his tone was level and calm, it carried a certain chill that penetrated to the very bone, assailing the listeners' hearts.

"Gustavo. Didn't I say before, that everything to do with Manhattan will be 'your responsibility'? So what you report should be the results, good or bad. Nothing else. So since what you 're reporting is considered bad news, should I regard this as your incompetence?"

The man called Gustavo had an expression like a frog that was about to be eaten by an eagle, and his huge, muscular frame leapt into the air in fright.

"Definitely not, sir."

"Then, are you saying you're competent?"

Hearing this, Gustavo fell silent.

"I'll be seeing my grandson today. I don't want such pointless conversation to tarnish a good day like today."

There were no reprimands, no suggestions- Bartolo simply said the above and turned and left.

The remaining people exchanged looks to see how others were faring. Then, a mix of anxiety and nervousness surfaced on everyone's faces.

"Now's not the time for daydreaming, you shitheads."

A completely different person from when his boss was around, Gustavo hollered frenziedly at his underlings.

"This is the same as handing over the drug to those robbers! We 're being ridiculed! The way things are, our work in Manhattan will only be 'bad news'! I don't care what you do, just find those bastards!"

To his subordinates, this kind of attitude was somewhat uncalled for.

The large bag full of case had been snatched away by some guy who appeared out of nowhere. This wasn't due to their negligence, but the abruptness of the situation, so even the transport driver couldn't react in time.

A large truck had slammed into the side of their vehicle. The strong impact sent the large case of drugs tumbling down from the car onto the ground, and the young person leaping down from the truck ran away with the new drug worth USD 60,000 on the market.

The robber should have also suffered from the tremendous impact, but he picked up the case and ran off as though he didn't feel any pain. These guys didn't dare to report it as a robbery, and

just treated it as a simple case of a car accident to escape responsibility.

Through investigation, they finally found out that the responsible truck had been stolen and the culprit seemed to have committed the act while on stimulants or some kind of drug. But the scene of the incident was in the Gandor Family's territory, and they had never heard of them setting foot into the drug market! Investigated the Gandors would yield nothing, so the investigation never got off the ground.

From others' perspectives, this was a joke. The ones secretly distributing drugs in that area were none other than the Runorata Family themselves. The drug had had been stolen by some unknown druggie in transit. To the lowest of the low-ranked members of the selling family, this was a complete joke.

"In any case, find the drug. Then butcher that guy—"

"That will, be, diffi, cult."

A hair-raising, sickly voice came from behind. Gustavo hurriedly looked back and saw that, at some point, Begg had sat himself in the corner of the room. There were many chairs, but he chose to sit on the floor.

"Oh, Begg. You scared me! … But what're you saying is difficult ?"

"I want, to hear, that guy's, thoughts. Stealing, my, medicine, commit, ting, such, astonishing, deeds, I must, talk, to him, and,

depending, use him, as a, guinea pig, for my, new drug. So, you, must, catch him, alive."

"What'd you say—"

Gustavo roared without thinking. His vocal cords couldn't get any louder than that. He knew a little about Begg: that he was already there before Gustavo joined the organization, that he appeared to be the earliest member, and Gustavo wasn't very sure of how old he was. At first glance, he looked around thirty, but in the eight years since Gustavo joined the organization, Begg didn't seem to have aged the slightest.

It was probably the effect of some kind of medication- every part of his body was very strange. But rather than saying those around him all envied his enduring youthfulness, it was more appropriate to say everyone treated him like a creep, so many people now discussed such things behind his back.

"—Quit making those impossible demands. Didn't we already give you a splendid factory? So stay the fuck outta our affairs!"

"H, huh. Give, me? That's, just, a coc, caine, factory, you, plundered, from, others. That's, just, on, the, surface. I, seem, to, remem, ber it, was, the, Genoards'. The, ones, who ran, the, previous, busi, ness."

The mockery in those fragmented sentences was obvious.

"Plundering doesn't sound good. You should say that we just committed some deeds that people refer to as frightful incidents in

a proprietor-less enterprise. It's the same whether on the surface or within."

"Pro, prietor, less? Y-, you, mean, dumping, the car, into, New, York Bay, with, its, passen, gers, still, inside? Vio, lent, too, violent. Crueler, than, Bartolo, by, far."

"… If you still consider yourself a member of the Family, then watch you say!"

Confronting an expressionless Gustavo, who was suppressing his own anger, Begg gave a faint smile of thinly-veiled disdain. As though tired of it all, Begg's satisfied smile immediately vanished, and, as though nothing had happened, he turned and walked out of the room. Just as he was leaving, he said something that sounded like an agreement.

"Listen, close, ly. I, said, so, before. Do, do, don't, raise, a hand, against, the, Martillo Family. This, is, the, condition, for my, coop, eration, with, you, Gustavo."

With that, Begg disappeared out of the door without even a backward glance.

"Hmph! So arrogant even though he knows fuckall but drugs… "

Gustavo raged, then turned his gaze back to his subordinates.

"Got it, men? Wipe out all the preposterous, small organizations like the Gandor Family, but put our drug business at the fore. This

is our duty in Manhattan. We might've got some extra work, but that ain't changing what needs doing. Destroy all obstacles. Destroy all the shitty weaklings, even those who didn't mess with us. Don't bother with warnings or negotiations- save this for only those with the same power as us. Listen, we just want them to see and acknowledge our power, it'll be too late by the time they realize, so be quick, be fast--"

Gustavo issued orders as though he were boss, as though the earlier scene had never happened.

"This is our time. That stupid robber and those Mafia assholes who still play 'hide-and-seek' don't exist. Destroy, destroy without a trace, wipe them from the past, present and future. That's— our mission."

Purchase

購入

1931 Late December Somewhere in Chinatown

On the other side of Manhattan stood a small, inconspicuous building.

Written on the paltry signboard was 'Daily Days'.

One of the small newspapers trapped between the fierce competition of the 'New York Times' and the 'New York Tribune'. Also known as the 'DD Newspaper Agency'.

That said, publishing newspapers was just a front. Their true face was an 'information agency', but on the whole, they were raking it in.

Normally, places of the information-gathering sort could never have only one stronghold. Just like in movies and stories, information should change hands stealthily in the corner of bars or deep within alleyways— that was the kind of feeling one would get. Because it wouldn't be the slightest bit strange for the information agency to disappear at any time once they were revealed to outsiders.

'Occupations' along the lines of detective agencies were truly unique in this business world- of course, news reporting, the police and the like were completely different matters.

This small building in a corner of Chinatown was the headquarters of the editorial department. More than half the workers were Chinese, with some other nationalities mixed in, and they published Chinese, English and Italian newspapers.

Stepping on old papers that had fluttered down onto the road, a few men walked into this small building.

The entire layout of the place was clear with just a glance, and a few workers who should be reporters and editors were strolling idly around the room to the accompaniment of the air and noise of chaos.

Seeing Asians everywhere at first, the men furrowed their brows. Then, a white man walked in from the inner part of the building.

Other districts aside, it was extremely rare to see white people working in Chinatown. The men revealed startled expressions as they watched the white man walk over. On one side of the table, that white man spoke to the stunned men.

"Welcome, how I may help you?"

A torrent of exceedingly ordinary New York English flowed from the man's mouth.

"Would you like to subscribe? Aah, my apologies. I'm in charge of the English desk. My name is Nicholas."

Faced with Nicholas, who had introduced himself up-front, the man with a large coat folded over his arm said arrogantly,

“We’re not interested in your papers. We’re just here to buy information.”

Hearing these impolite words, Nicholas replied, looking a little hurt,

“Our newspapers are actually very good… Then, what information would you like to know?”

"Do you know about the accident that happened on Mulberry Street yesterday?"

In response to the man's query, Nicholas offhandedly outlined the incident in question.

"Yes, the collision between a truck and an automobile that happened a little after one in the afternoon yesterday, yes? It'd be better to refer to it as an incident rather than an accident, where the culprit driving the truck escaped. The two victims of the hit-and-run are respectively called Sam Buschetta and Anselmo Jonel. The culprit is currently still on the run, and he’s a man with a scar on his neck--- Am I correct?"

The sudden wave of information stunned the men into exchanging dumbfounded looks. What Nicholas had just said was information that only a small number of people should know, including those involved and the police.

Watching the guys who were at an utter loss as to what to do, Nicholas continued briskly,

"And the two victims were members of the renowned Mafia Runorata Family based in New York--- and also, your friends."

Hearing these careless words, these guys' bodies were like they' d been frozen. They hadn't identified themselves nor were they intending to, but this white man had already seen through their real identity--

But we can't be thrown so easily. Maybe he just guessed correctly based on our attire and appearance. If we reacted unusually, wouldn't that be falling for his ploy?

"Yeah. Since you already know all these details, you should also know why we have come?"

Although they looked very composed, their palms had been sweating for quite a while.

"The whereabouts of that guy with the scar on his neck. Any related information will do---"

"Scottish immigrant. 22 years old."

Nicholas replied blandly without even waiting for the man to finish.

"…… Huh?"

"Starting from now, you would need to pay for what I'll say."

In their impatience to hear news, the men had been completely unaware that the 'transaction' had already begun.

"The information you want to know- 500 dollars, cash. On top of that, you need to provide us with a piece of 'information' in return."

"? Information?"

"Ah, well, it's telling us what we wish to know— that's to say, what was inside the case that was stolen. You don't have to hide it- someone already 'reported' that what was stolen was a large black case earlier on."

Nicholas gave a jovial smile as he explained. That expression and tone of voice mingled to create a kind of unspeakable terror.

"You think we'll tell you?"

"Then forget I said anything and please be on your way!"

"… Just so I know, if we tell you and the police came to ask, how would you answer?"

"Why, then it's business!"

The guys listening to this were so pissed off that the throbbing veins at their temples were about to pop.

"Don't screw around with me! You wanna die?!"

Every other editorial member turned their gaze onto the agitated men.

"!?"

On regaining their composure, their anger suddenly changed into confusion.

The Asian reporters in the room were all expressionlessly holding guns, the muzzles pointing at them in a semi-circle. At first glance, it looked chaotic and disorderly, but in reality all the muzzles avoided Nicholas.

From another perspective, the numerous tables and mounds of books formed advantageous concealment for their opponents, whereas on their side, there was no cover whatsoever. Just like a small enemy regiment surrounded by countless city walls and trenches.

These guys were so scared that they broke out in cold sweat. Nicholas lifted a hand, and the reporters and editors put away their guns.

"My apologies. You can't be too careful in our trade."

After speaking, he dipped his head as though nothing had happened, and picked up the conversation again.

"Ah well, listen calmly. Even if we sold that information to the police, that cannot be used as incriminating evidence against you. It'd better if you thought about how to destroy the evidence instead."

As Nicholas blathered on about some nonsensical reasons, he slowly outlined some of the internal rules of the information agency.

"Of course, you may think that you would be punished by your superiors as a result, but you don't have to worry about that. Our principle is to keep the sources of information a secret. You have no choice but to believe this. If by any chance something unfortunate happens to the Runorata Family, pretend that you saw nothing and that you never came here. This should be all right?"

"The man called Roy Maddock. Where does he live--"

After a long moment of dazed confusion, the Runorata men still ended up answering unwillingly.

After obtaining the news they wanted from The Informer, they still had to provide information on their side. But--

"That case was for the cash, the protection fees we collected."

These guys thought that there was no need to say the truth about drugs and the like, and so made up what they thought was a perfect lie. This kind of lie wouldn't be seen through, because it was something that had never mattered in the first place.

Hearing that, Nicholas gave a somewhat hard-pressed smile.

"If you're going to lie, at the very least come up with something a little more creative. Otherwise, we will provide information equivalent to your wonderful lies. Now, as for your lie, it's a little …"

Nicholas shook his head at the guys who were deploying sophistry, and continued,

"The Runorata Family's territory isn't on this side, is it? Furthermore, your 'protection fees' are usually collected at the beginning of the month, no? A collection at this time of month is impossible, so please think carefully before lying again."

Seeing that his opponents no longer had the power to resist, Nicholas pressed on,

"What was inside should be the 'drug', right? The newest drug circulating around the Gandor Family's territory recently. It was stolen in transit, am I right? Yes or no? You have five seconds."

At the sudden question, one of the men unknowingly nodded.

Having obtained such a definite answer, Nicholas tossed them a line before returning to his own desk.

"Thank you for your patronage."

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"Miz, dis oughta be the ''formation stop' my child'ood frien' izzat. "

As she spoke, she led Eve into the small building.

"Is this a newspaper agency?"

There was anxiety on the girl's face, perhaps due to the nervousness of being in a big city for the first time.

With Samasa in the lead, they had come to the small newspaper agency in Chinatown. Scrawled on the signboard was 'DD'.

Although they had come to the villa in New York, how could they possibly find out what had happened to her older brother, Dallas? Eve was very impatient in the beginning. Because no one knew anything about her brother's friendship circles, or even about the work he was doing.

Just as everyone was fretting about that, Samasa suddenly shouted,

"Mizz! If yah wanna ken sumthin', then yah gotta go t' th' 'Th' Informer' an' ask, y' can't go wrong goin' there!"

"What nonsense… The Informer? You'd let our lady meet those rotten hoodlums?"

"Oyy, Benjamin. Yah sayin' mah good frien's a hoodlim?"

"Quiet! Your childhood friend must have had linguistic difficulties too- can we really trust information from that kind of person? Also, my name is Ben-*ya*-min! How many times must I repeat myself before you understand!? Please refrain from using English when calling my name!"

The old steward Benjamin vehemently retorted.

But there simply was no other way, so in the end they could only try their luck…

"What is this, a newspaper agency? Hmph, then we may be able to trust them to a certain extent, Miss."

As he spoke coolly, the old steward opened the door for his mistress.

At first, Eve didn't dare to walk in front. The old steward opened the door— then Samasa pressed against her from behind and pushed her in.

"A-, acting just like members of a comedy troupe!"

The old steward grumbled as he shut the door. The chaos before them, the jumble of conversations in languages never heard of before- both suddenly assaulted the brain. For a young mistress who had never seen the workplace of ordinary folk, the scene before her eyes was just like as if she'd come to an alien planet.

"Oh wow…"

"Miss?"

Hearing the old steward's call, Eve regained her composure.

"Ah… Excuse me for interrupting while you're busy. Please, could you spare us a little time?"

As she spoke politely, Eve surveyed her surroundings uneasily.

To comfort Eve, Samasa placed her round, fat hand on her shoulder.

"Dun mindat, ring up dat Elean if y'dun mind… s'pal, lukin' for 'im."

"???"

The old steward's eyes popped and his jaw dropped at that- he simply couldn't catch Samasa's meaning. Eve leaned in to whisper in his ear,

"Don't worry, Samasa just told them to call Elean… Yes, just that."

The old steward felt a little embarrassed at having his mistress translate for him, and so he seized hold of someone who knew English and told him the purpose of their visit.

When Nicholas learned of their intention, he proceeded up the stairs to the second floor.

After a while, he brought along a peculiarly dressed person down. Like Samasa, he was black, but he wore a black, traditional Chinese Tang suit.

When passing by the Asians, he exchanged a few words with them, speaking fluent Chinese. On top of that, he wore a very strange pair of glasses, making him stand out even more from the norm.

The instant the man recognized Samasa he made a very welcoming pose, greeting his friend with New York-accented English.

"Sa---masa! Long time, long time no see! Just how many years has it been since we last met! Wonderful! Today is absolutely wonderful! I must offer my thanks for such an exciting day for all the people in this city!"

This body that was taller than the average person by 2-3 times immediately enveloped the old friend in a hug. But, even with his

arms fully stretched out, he could only reach around Samasa's upper back. Locked in the strange embrace, they rejoiced at seeing each other again.

"Aaah, reminiscing can wait 'til later. First, let's talk about your mistress's business? According to the rules, we have to take a fee of 500 dollars in order to tell you the news you want to know of, but since it's Samasa's mistress, I'll provide this service free this time!"

The mistress and her servants were invited to the reception room. Eve and Samasa sat on the sofa, while the old steward stood dignifiedly by the door.

The black man dressed in the Tang suit— Elean Duga eyed the old steward with considerable interest as he said to Eve,

"Oh my, oh my, oh my? Miss Eve Genoard's request is to find ' Dallas Genoard, whose whereabouts have been unknown since a year ago'— right now, my men are already collecting the information, and they'll come back and tell me shortly, I'm guessing very soon. No, no, really. Soon, soon! So, about your brother? I'm sure he'll be fine! Relax, there isn't anything in this city we don't know about. And my men should be coming back with news about your brother shortly—"

Elean was interrupted by the knocking on the door.

"Oh my, come in, come in, come in!"

The old steward immediately opened the door and an Asian holding what appeared to be a document entered. That man's complete lack of expression made Eve feel a little uneasy. But she had no choice but to wait and see Elean's reaction when he reads that document.

At first, Elean was even humming a tune as he opened the document to have a look. Then suddenly, he stood up and walked over to the window, his hands shaking.

Outside, the sun was already setting, the evening glow reflecting off the tiles of the roofs, dazzling one's eyes.

As Elean gazed out at the scenery, he slowly said,

"Yes. When did it start! I used to be a proud person- 'proud' almost seems too positive- and I kept conning myself. In other words, 'I didn't know my place'. I realized this couldn't continue. I always thought that, but in the end I still couldn't change. This kind of rashness is just like taking drugs- once you've touched it, you can never be free of it."

Although she didn't understand a single thing of what he said, she could sense he was avoiding the topic.

"Th-, then, please tell me! My brother, Brother Dallas, where is he!"

Agitated, Eve stood up, and the old steward didn't know what to do. In direct contrast to Eve's agitation, the information agency was very tranquil.

"Aah, excuse me. Truly, my apologies. Today was supposed to be a 'wonderful day'. But I, I seem to be a harbinger of misfortune, a bastard who not only tells others of bad news, but seeks to make profit by doing so. I really want to tell you, tell you that your brother is fine, but a realist information agency will never tell lies. As for our clients, we will never give them false news, I really want to tell them good news, but I can't, aah, aah, sometimes I truly loathe this from the very depths of my heart. I--"

"Quit foolin' 'round or I'll turn on yah!"

Samasa shook Elean violently as she shouted angrily. Finally, he came to the 'conclusion'.

"Every time I tell my clients this type of news, I feel somewhat guilty. But even so, I'll be frank!"

Sinking into complete depression, Elean pronounced that bad news.

"Your older brother, Dallas Genoard, is currently at the bottom of a river. In the dark, cold, deep depths of Hudson River, thrown into a drum along with two cohorts and sunk to the very riverbed. "

Hearing Elean's toneless reply, Eve's heart froze over momentarily.

It was like time had stopped- she could only hear the deafening sounds of her heart beating and her own breathing in this world. Eve suppressed her almost collapsing emotions, struggling to squeeze out breath from the depths of her lungs.

"Is… is that really true?"

"I am very sorry- it's absolutely accurate. Furthermore, we even know who did it. Just a small organization called the Gandor Family…"

She couldn't remember what came after that.

By the time she had regained consciousness, Eve was already holding a fork and knife, sitting in front of a dining table.

It began in that instant- her mind blanked out, and she didn't even know how she came back to the villa. Sitting at the side of the enormous dining table was Samasa, although it was obvious that she had already eaten. Benjamin was just standing silently by Eve's side, and it was likely that he still hadn't eaten.

Eve had just been sitting like that all the while, then, as though having made a decision, opened her mouth to say,

"Mr. Benjamin… Ms. Samasa. Truly, thank you very much."

"!"

Hearing such words, Samasa and Benjamin both turned their gazes onto Eve.

"Miss! Is something the matter, how could you say something like that to us! Please don't scare us! You must take care of yourself !"

"Yeah! Once ye be fillin' that belly o' yours, then you'll be full of energy!"

"Truly… thank you!"

Seeing Eve give a weak smile, Samasa said loudly and forcefully,

"Dun take it t'heart! Those guys at th' information agency ain't righ', we kent really trust 'em!"

"Precisely! Well said! Not a single word those queer scoundrels said was true, so please don't believe them, Miss!"

The two were desperately trying to comfort Eve, and at that, Eve just smiled a little.

"Thank you, you two. I'm a little tired today, so I'll go upstairs and rest first."

Eve's words weren't the slightest bit like what a master would say to his servants, and with a thin smile, she left the dining hall.

The food on the table was untouched, and just continued getting colder.

--- Really, all this. I didn't think it would be like this.

Most of the people who disappeared in Manhattan were no longer in this world. I should already have known this. But what was I still hoping for? Could it be, I was still clinging onto the faint hope of a sudden miracle? The power of prayer was already used up that time. Aah, what a foolish deed I did.

There was no need to wait for a miracle then.

If I just had a bit more courage, couldn't I have just stopped Dallas from leaving home?

That was just, just a prayer born out of the intense desire to escape the terror.

--Aah, the time I truly wished a miracle would happen was when Father and Big Brother died. Of course, I knew that the dead could not be resurrected, but at the very least, at the very least I had hoped that Brother Dallas would be safe.

But the miracle still didn't happen.

If there was such a thing as a 'life's wish', if it could really come true, then I no longer had this power. So I should have known all this, I should have realized it from long ago. But why, why was I still so sad?

I never liked Brother Dallas. He was uneducated and unskilled, base and shameless, immoral, and frequently made himself hated. But what came to mind was the scene when we met for the last time.

On the next day after God's emissaries, the thieves, came- that gentle face as he taught me billiards.

--Aah, why, why was Brother kind only to me, so gentle and so genial? Why didn't he treat me like the others and do hateful things?

Without being conscious of it, Eve was caving in to her own fear . Her past stubbornness; when she thought about it, grief, regret and other complicated emotions tangled together and she couldn't pull free.

--Could I only cry? When would I finally be able to forget? When Father and my two brothers had passed away, was all I could do just cry? Like a year ago, would I only rely on others, only continue to pray?

She contemplated these thoughts. If there was still even a sliver of chance, she decided she would never let it go.

I couldn't continue like this anymore. Now, what I had to do was— get revenge for Brother.

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As Eve and the other two were departing from DD, a man entered the building.

On that man's face was a somewhat arrogant smirk. Unlike Nicholas's, which gave people the feeling that he was bright and capable, this man's smile seemed like he was sizing up something.

The man opened the editorial department door, just as Nicholas and Elean were about to walk out.

"Aah, you're back, Henry. Elean's not in a good mood and it's also time for me to get off work, so I'll leave this place in your hands."

"No, no. Thank you for your hard work."

The man called Henry gazed after the two's backs with a flattering smile.

"Rest assured, you can leave the rest to me. Do have a leisurely drink."

"… It's because it's you that we can't relax, but the director and vice-director aren't here, damn it!"

Nicholas gave a worried shake of his head and led Elean out of the newspaper agency.

Henry watched them cheerfully and confidently, sniggering softly,

"Oh my, it's been quite a while since I last received clients alone . It'd be great if an admirable client came!"

His wish was about to be fulfilled.

A man sidled suspiciously into the agency, his face concealed by a hat and a scarf, and a pair of sunglasses over his eyes. All the

editorial staff simultaneously stopped what they were doing and slowly reached into their breast pockets or into drawers. Then, unshaken, the entrant proclaimed loudly to everyone in faltering Chinese, “I have information I want to report, is there someone who can speak English?”

By chance, Henry was just returning after finishing preparatory work. With a discomforting smile plastered on his face, he said very happily,

“If you don’t mind, you may speak to me.”

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A bar under the Martillo Family’s jurisdiction The ‘*Alveare*’

Somewhere inside the *Alveare*, Elean and Nicholas were drinking honey-blended wine. The spacious shop front was decorated beautifully, making this place feel more like a high-class restaurant than a bar.

“Is he okay, that Henry guy?”

“At least he’s much, much, much stronger than me. Aah, I’m no good. No good, no good, no good. If something is no good then all of it isn’t good.

“You really aren’t any good. Don’t take it to heart- since you’re hiding it, don’t have those pointless expectations. So from now

onwards, you must improve in controlling your own emotions. This isn't the first time I've told you this."

A waitress in a *qipao* came bearing the dishes, and Elean silently watched as he rested his chin on his hand. Then, as though suddenly remembering something, he lifted his head.

"That's right! I remembered something."

"What?"

"That Dallas guy. He seemed to know a special secret."

"Special secret?"

In the whole of DD, only the director and vice-director had access to those special secrets. But it was possible that those kinds of documents simply didn't exist. Or maybe those secrets were all stored in their heads, but this wasn't something anyone could verify.

"Isn't that Dallas fellow a delinquent? What kind of big secret would he know… no, wait, wait."

Nicholas suddenly came to a halt, and downed all the wine in the glass.

"The ones who disposed of Dallas were the Gandors, right? So, is it related to the 'immortals'?"

"Aah, yes, that's right."

'Immortals'. This abruptly introduced, unreal word was unconditionally accepted by Elean. To them, 'immortals' were people who undoubtedly and really existed, and they had actually seen them before. For example, the waitress who just served the dishes was one of them.

Information regarding immortals was also trickling in gradually .

200 years ago, alchemists aboard a ship that was headed towards this continent obtained the power of immortality. But there were also limitations for immortals, which were that no false names could be used between immortals or in public arenas, and that they could 'eat' one of their own through their right hand.

Next, an incident a year ago caused some immortals to appear in this city. The Martillo Family's executives, the waitress, the shopkeeper of the *Alveare* and the three Gandor brothers.

According to the information, there were a few others as well, but Nicholas didn't know their names. Perhaps the bosses knew who they were!

"Hey, if we don't ask the director ourselves we'll never know."

"Yeah."

The two finished here, then continued drinking and eating.

At this moment, a new customer walked in. It was a girl around twenty years old, carrying a very large black, leather case in one

hand. The two people from the information agency immediately recognized that girl.

"That girl, isn't she the waitress for the Gandor Family's bar?"

"Aah, that's right. I believe she's called Edith?"

Nicholas remembered something. He had neglected to tell the Runorata Family's men during the day that this girl was related to the person who stole their drugs— she was Roy's girlfriend.

And— that leather case tightly held in one hand.

Not quite believing what he saw, Nicholas watched Edith's every move alertly.

"Ah— Werucome-- Edith, you not here for long time ah!"

"Yes, Lia. You're still as well as ever!"

As Edith greeted her good friend wearing the *qipao*, she revealed a burdened expression.

Lia Linshan was immediately worried at seeing such an expression on Edith's face. At this moment in time the seats hadn't been filled, so she wasn't very busy now.

"What happen? You seems like problems on your heart?"

"No, that… Oh, actually, I have something I really need you to help me with."

As Edith said with a troubled expression, she handed the black case over.

"Can you please help me keep this suit case for a bit?"

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Let's turn back time to the afternoon.

"That's why I said, why did you bring it here!"

From the flat Edith rented came the sounds of an argument over a large suitcase.

"I really don't know what you were thinking, to actually do this kind of ridiculous thing!"

"There's no use saying anything now. Look, the past won't come again, what shouldn't have been done has also become reality. I want to forget everything that has happened, but that's not possible either. Now, look, we better think about how to deal with this."

His verve from yesterday gone, Roy at this moment had become meek and humble as he continued to explain to Edith, who was rolling her eyes.

"Really! What were you doing! It's precisely because you always say that when you're taking drugs, 'the entire world merges with me' and that kind of ridiculous bull!"

"I can't help it, it's because I really want to become that way that I take drugs, then, people who experience that feeling, even just once, can't ever forget it, especially for weak-willed people like me."

"If you can actually calmly psychoanalyze yourself, then why touch that stuff in the first place! Bastard!"

What followed was Edith using a whole hour to continue berating Roy, and in the interval she used the word 'bastard' at least 300 times.

At the end of the scolding, Edith felt exhausted, and she took in a deep breath.

"But I'm surprised you didn't touch the stuff in this case. This makes me feel a little relieved."

"Actually… I really wanted to use it. But if I even touch this stuff, those Runorata people will never let me get away with this… I, I'm really scared. Those guys can do anything. Those Runorata people, I know full well what they…"

"That's to say, you didn't touch that stuff because you were so scared. So I'm saying you couldn't possibly have snapped out of it

… Normally, you'd take it even though you feared the effects of the drug, but you didn't this time. So there are times when even Roy the junkie is scared of death!"

Seeing Edith's too-good-to-be-true expression, Roy answered a little shakily,

"I'm scared, those guys— especially that Gustavo, they're extremely cruel, won't give the slightest warning or threat, and even innocent people are slaughtered without exception. I don't care if I die. It's just, it's just—"

The spineless Roy couldn't speak. Perhaps she understood his sincerity, or perhaps she didn't, Edith immediately calmed down and hugged the trembling Roy.

"Sorry. Thank you."

With that, Edith took the black leather case and stood up.

"Although it took a long time, you finally kept your promise. So this time it's my turn. Roy definitely won't die. I don't care if those assholes are from the Runorata Family or the Gandors, I'll protect you."

As she spoke, she lifted the suitcase, turned and walked to the door.

"Where, where're you going?"

"Anyhow, this case is our 'trump card'. But it'll be easily stolen if we keep it- and if we're caught with it, that's it for us. So first we need to find a trustworthy person to hide this with."

"What! No way, that person'll get involved too."

"That's not a problem. The Runorata Family now only cares about dealing with those small organizations, and there's a place they definitely won't touch. I'll go there to find a friend who'll help."

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"So, that's how it is… I know this really isn't very nice, but… sorry!"

"If you wanna say sorry, why not beg ah!"

In a corner of the '*Alveare*', Edith and Lia were conversing quietly.

"--- That's right. Sorry. Never mind…"

"But, actually is okay. First I help you keep?"

"Huh?"

Edith widened her eyes at such a ready response.

"Can see, Edith is really liking Roy ah!"

This kind of joking tone only served to make Edith feel a little worried.

"Is, is it really okay? Then, if possible, don't let the Martillo Family people know, okay? The people here seem to be on very good terms with the Keith and Luck brothers."

"Only business cooperation, no problem. No problem, but my room has no lock, only can give other trusting people."

Although there was a stumped feeling in her words, perhaps it would be even safer if this item passed through several hands.

"Right, the people Lia can trust, I can also trust. Then I'll leave it to you, thank you very, very much!"

Gazing after Edith's receding back, Nicholas and Elean, who had been attentively eavesdropping, collectively exhaled a sigh.

In the bar, it would usually be difficult to hear Edith and Lia's dialogue from where they were sitting, but Nicholas and Elean were used to the noise and racket of the editorial department, and so they could more or less make out the general content.

"My, my, we've really picked up a seriously juicy tidbit of information. How should we use it?"

"No matter what, we'll report it to the Director tomorrow. Having gotten such a valuable piece of information, the Director'll no longer regard us as useless, idle people!"

"Us…? Don't lump me together with an idle person like you!"

Elean was stunned by such a response, and Nicholas smirked as he drained the entire glass of wine.

"Obtaining information directly isn't our forte."

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"I see, I see. I fully understand what you're trying to say."

At the same time, Roy and Henry were chatting in the newspaper agency.

"That's to say, what you want to know is this? The Runorata Family's weakness?"

"Aah, ye-, yes. From stealing the drugs until now, no matter what, I can't let them get me, or my friends, so I have to do something."

Roy's palms sweated as he explained the entire situation from start to finish. At this, Henry smiled as he complimented Roy,

"Oh my, the big secret you confessed today certainly is very important information. However, the question is money. If you want to know an even greater secret, in theory I will need at least 5000 dollars."

"Five, five thousand dollars!?"

To buy drugs, Roy had spent virtually all the money he had, so requiring him to pay so much money at once was absolutely impossible. Furthermore, at a recessionary time like this, even average people couldn't offer up such a large sum.

"But---"

As Henry smiled, he suggested a compromise.

"That's not to say there's no other way. This isn't a normal transaction, and as a firm it's difficult to give you guaranteed information—"

Standing up from the chair in the reception room, Henry leaned close to Roy's ear.

"Right now I'm not a worker here, just a person talking to himself, and you accidentally overheard it, how does that sound?"

"Is, is that okay?"

Seeing Roy's gleaming eyes, Henry smiled gave a smile of satisfaction.

"Do you know the millionaires, the Genoards?"

Roy shook his head.

"Based in New Jersey, they are millionaires primarily involved in the textiles industry, but that's just a facade. In reality, they manage factories manufacturing marijuana, cocaine and other drugs, then profit by selling these drugs to the market through the Runorata Family. That's to say, every generation of the Genoard family -- actually, only up to the second generation-- controlled the source of drugs, and held an extremely high status in the underworld.

Roy's eyes popped at the suddenness of the news. It actually wasn't totally unrelated to him, and it was possible that the new drugs that appeared on the market a few days ago, and the marijuana and cocaine that he took in the past were all manufactured by them.

"Ah, but, after the first generation head of family passed away, his son and his eldest grandson inherited the family business. Since then, their relationship with the Runorata Family… especially with Gustavo, took a turn for the worse, perhaps because they couldn't reach a consensus on the matter of money."

"---Then, they crafted a story and killed the head and the eldest grandson, and the Runoratas took over the Genoard factory. They acquired the cover businesses, threatened important staff, and so that was how they finally swallowed up the Genoard business."

Having heard all of the above, Roy shouted excitedly,

"Good, good! This is my saviour—"

"Don't be hasty. Right now there isn't any evidence- all the witnesses have been bought by them."

"Then doesn't that become meaningless?"

"But there's still one more key person. In addition, that person is currently in Manhattan."

"?"

"It doesn't matter whether that person knows of it or not. So long as that person exists, then this person will be a trump card against the Runorata Family. You just have to be able to protect that person's safety."

Henry smirked, just like a demon mocking people's misfortunes .

"Use that person as a shield, then negotiate with the Runoratas after you've left this place with your loved ones. Then, not only will your friends be safe, but you may even receive a greater reward. Once you've reached a safe location, you can release that person. This way, no one gets killed or hurt; just that the one person gets imprisoned for a few days. This is the best method."

As though hypnotized by that smile, Roy resolutely stared at Henry.

Henry's lips turned up in an evil smile, and slowly pronounced that person's name,

"That person is the head's granddaughter and also the youngest daughter of the Genoard family — Eve Genoard."

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At the same time The Gandor Family office

In an alleyway just off Mulberry Street, in the basement of a small jazz bar, there was an area as large as that on the surface. This was the Gandor Family's office, the core of the organization, unfolding in a stately manner before one's eyes.

"And, how's that idiot?"

Next door to the large saloon where the underlings were gathered, the three bosses were sitting in the small parlor.

"I'm letting Tick handle it. Though I'm not sure whether the guy has any nerves left to feel the pain."

In response to the question by Berga, the heavy-set second-oldest, Luck, the youngest, replied blandly,

"……"

As usual, the eldest, Keith, didn't speak, silently shuffling poker cards by himself.

At this moment, there was knocking on the door, and an easygoing voice carried into the room.

"Good day everyone, it's Tick."

"Aah, Mr. Tick. Please come in."

Then, the door opened, revealing a youthful face; just like that of a young man who ran a flower shop.

--Except, he had a pair of two-feet-long scissors in each hand.

Although nothing dripped, the blades were covered in red from tip to handle.

"Hopeless, hopeless, absolutely hopeless! That guy's taken too much drugs- he just doesn't have the conscious of a normal person anymore."

His eyes squinted in a smile, he waved his hands, scissors snipping in sync. Because he had already anticipated this, Luck just gave a soft sigh.

"Spending another month on him won't hurt- I can always try again once the medication has passed."

"No, no need. Forget him, dump him at the door of the police station tonight."

"I understand."

Tick smiled an innocent smile like a kid, leaving as he waved the large pairs of scissors about- *snicker snack*.

"Is it okay? That was the guy who cut off your head with a knife, right?"

Hearing Berga's question, Luck shook his head with a weary expression.

"Doesn't matter. Someone definitely paid him to do it. That was just a drug addict who couldn't even control himself, so even if we were to kill him, people would just say he died from a drug overdose."

As Luck spoke, he pondered.

--Aah, furthermore.

Recently, he'd been acting like nothing mattered anymore, and he was aware of this. But, previously--- compared to a year ago, he had changed into a completely different person, to one who was so rational and benign. His past self would have sent that junkie to the other world long ago. No, it was likely his past self would have already been long dead.

Yet now, he felt that there simply wasn't such a need. The attack was by a junkie, and furthermore, it had no impact whatsoever on the organization's reputation, so his 'anger' simply wouldn't rouse . He understood the reason. A year ago, the 'wine of immortality' incident happened on this very street. Because he had become involved, he had also become immortal.

But those who didn't kill would be killed. In this world of unwritten laws, he would never be killed. These so-called unwritten laws had no meaning.

--Humans, once they obtained an immortal body, became soulless creatures. Even so, Keith and Berga haven't changed much up to now.

Besides Berga, who became 'more unyielding' due to his immortal body, big brother Keith just paid more attention to his sense of duty towards work. In comparison, he had fallen into such a disgraceful state.

"But, if not for that, I'd have departed from this world long ago. "

"… But, I'm someone living in such a world, I can't die… This is all reality."

Perhaps because he couldn't tell what his younger brother was thinking, Berga didn't press the issue.

"Really, yeah, never mind, let's just do it your way!"

"But what shocks me is that the same thing happened to Firo last year, and he raised such a tremendous fuss about it. While us, when our throats get cut, we can't even get revenge- how deplorably weak we are."

Firo Prochainezo. A childhood friend of the three Gandor brothers and now a young executive of the Martillo Family, which

commanded a very large territory. Like Luck, he had also been attacked by a junkie a year ago, but he didn't get hurt at all.

"Honestly, once you become immortal, your instincts become dull."

"But you've always been a guy who never liked fighting. Weak guys will only do weak things, right?"

"It'd be bad if they don't do weak things."

"……"

Watching the two quarrel, the eldest who had never said a word, Keith, suddenly looked at his watch, then stood up and pulled on his coat.

"Aah, it's time to go home, Keith."

"Is Mrs. Kate well?"

Hearing his wife's name, Keith donned his hat and gave a light nod of the head. It was a nod, but it was rare that he ever uttered a reply.

"Eh, Luck. Are you happy like this? You should hurry up and find a girlfriend too."

"Eyes forward, take a look at yourself."

"Ah, with that villainous face of yours, looks like it'll be a difficult task!"

I really don't want to be lectured by Berga of all people. Although he thought that, he didn't say it aloud. Because Berga, too, was already married.

"Say, has Berga made up with Mrs. Kalia yet?"

"……You'll understand once you've married. It's a pain."

Perhaps those words held significance or they were just words plucked from the air, Berga also acted as though he was about to leave. Luck had never felt lonely because he was by himself, so as usual he watched his two older brothers depart. However, the entire atmosphere in the room became tense the next moment.

"Boss! Boss! There's trouble!"

"What happened?"

Berga roared to the underling. Then, another one of his men appeared, drenched in blood. He was one of the executives in charge of the surrounding race tracks. It was obvious he had taken remarkable damage, but this man kept his back straight before his bosses and reported without any change in expression.

"Sorry, boss. The enemy's attack took us by surprise. We immediately retaliated, but only caught one alive. This is all my fault."

Behind the man who was coolly reporting, between the rows of snooker tables, lay a man Luck didn't recognize, oblivious to the world around him.

"The damage?"

A stern voice sounded in the room. Keith, who rarely spoke, said this, inquiring further information about the situation.

"The races had just finished, so no customers were injured. The money has already been dispersed by my men. Other than injuries to the shopkeeper and I, there were no other damages."

Although bleeding from various gunshot wounds, that man still kept a faint smile on his face till the very end. At this, Keith just said a line.

"Thank you for your hard work."

What was most commendable was that this man bowed respectfully before exiting.

Although such a momentous incident had occurred, most people within the organization were extremely calm, and someone was administering first aid to the injured executive. The underling who had run in shouting and panicking was a recently-joined newcomer; he stood in the room filled with the stench of blood, his face whiter than sheets. Standing by the newcomer's side, the other members all bowed to the three bosses.

"Boss… We just received a report that three other places have also come under attack. A bar, a casino and a motel. Our men all quickly returned fire, and only a few guys have been lightly injured."

Hearing the report, Keith took off the coat he had already put on; Berga angrily shook his fists; Luck looked very calm on the surface, merely creasing his brow over how he should deal with the matter.

"Attacked at the same time……? We and the surrounding organizations have always abided by the truce - there wasn't any sign of instability."

"These guys coming out of nowhere, once I find them I'll kill them all!"

"……"

At this moment, the man lying at the centre of the room stirred. It was the guy who had been captured alive by the executive during the sudden attack on the race course.

"Ooh……"

This fellow sensed something was wrong, and gave an agonized cry.

"Hey, wait a sec, 'ooh'? Did you just say 'ooh'?"

Berga jumped up and stomped heavily on the man's chest. Without any warning, the tips of his feet launched a sudden attack at the man's chest.

"What 'ooh'! Didya never think you'd end up like this? You dare come here without ever dreaming that you'd be fucking mobbed or killed by us? You just wanna have a little knockabout with us? Huh? Huh?"

Berga was still venting his frustration by wildly kicking that guy, when Luck slowly approached from the side.

"My, my, I finally know the face of the one who slit my throat."

Staring at the fox-eyed man standing to one side, the pitiful captive shouted as he spat blood,

"Can't be!? You bastard, didn't your throat already get cut---!"

"Indeed. And you didn't come to rescue your comrade afterwards but ran away. Ah well, I guess you were all deep in the thralls of drugs, so you dared to pick a fight with us on our territory. You think too highly of yourselves."

As Luck spoke with a look of indifference, he called out to the innermost door in the basement,

"Mr. Tick! Mr. Tick!"

"Yes? Is something the matter?"

Tick poked his head out from inside, still holding in his hands the large pairs of scissors from just now.

"Take care of another one for me."

Watching the object in the hand of the man who was walking towards him, the captive broke out in cold sweat, and every muscle trembled. Tick ambled in the direction of the man, revealing a sincere, sorrowful expression.

"I have to first apologize to you, you see. I'm sorry."

Could it be the time for apologies and not 'underground interrogation'? It didn't matter, because when the captive heard his next words, he wept harder in his heart.

"The blood and grease from the previous person hasn't been cleaned off yet, and there are no spares I can use now. So, you see, I might not be able to cut as well—"

The pairs of scissors in both his hands were waved around, '*snicker snack*', he came closer and closer.

"I think it's going to hurt a lo---t. Twice as much as the previous person."

"Wa-, wa-, wait a minute! I'll talk! I'll tell you anything!"

"C'mon, don't say that. Show me the killing intent you had when you attacked the Gandors."

Tick said as he continued approaching. For a second, Luck had a sudden urge to stop his advance.

"Say, Nicola, who was the one who shot you?"

Luck turned to the executive who had reported while covered in blood. As the man called Nicola wrapped the bandages, he slowly answered.

"It's this guy. So I was a little harsh on his men. My personal feelings got in the way, please forgive me."

Luck didn't care about the personal feelings he spoke of; he drew closer to the captive, declaring with a faint smile,

"Ah, Nicola said it himself. Because it wasn't easy."

--Aah, furthermore. There was the feeling of 'anger' in the deep recesses of my heart: this was good. The anger rushing up at the enemies who injured Nicola and injured my men.

His occupation would definitely anger people, because it was an occupation where lives could be lost at any time purely for money. This wasn't strange at all. Although he understood that, standing aside and doing nothing when friends were hurt was a completely different matter.

Luck felt a little more at ease as the agonized cries sounded in his ear.

--Aah, come to think of it, that guy should be wailing as well. No, that shouldn't be possible underwater. A year ago, those scum who murdered our four men, those possessing incomplete ' immortal bodies', low-life scoundrels who continue to pay for their crimes in the dark depths of the river. What was the leader called again?

--Something like, Dallas, Ge-… Ge-…? What was it? Aah, I really didn't want to dig up the past.

Luck struggled with past memories as he lightly bit his lower lip.

The anger residing in his body would never vanish.

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Same day, late at night DD Newspaper Agency

Standing before the newspaper agency, Keith slowly opened the door.

Although it was already late at night, there were still people working industriously. One of them recognized Keith and immediately picked up the internal phone and called someone. After a brief dialogue, the Asian opened the door leading to the second floor and gave Keith a Chinese bow, clasping his left hand over his right fist before his chest.

"……"

Keith silently walked up to the second floor, heading straight for the innermost door. Phones rang continuously in the various rooms on the way. There were workers busy receiving calls in every room, but even so the phones didn't stop ringing. Just how many phones were there- this was a question people would ask every time they came to the second floor.

On the innermost door was a plaque declaring it to be the Director's Suite, and from inside came the same chorus of phone rings.

"You came, Keith. No, I should say, you should come."

As the door opened, this voice sounded from within. The voice originated from behind the mountain of information before his eyes, but other than his voice, the man himself couldn't be seen, so

there was no way of judging whether it was the voice of a young or old person. Keith surveyed the surroundings, to see more than half the room buried in a large quantity of paper.

"Amazing, isn't it. Just like comedies in the era of silent movies- there isn't even space to organize the information. I didn't prepare any chair for you- recently, I've been entering through the window with a ladder. Once I even had a policeman point a gun at me."

Although the phones didn't stop ringing, Keith could still clearly hear the speaker's voice.

"Then, what kind of 'information' are you here for? I received news that a bunch of poor folks barged into your territory, and I'm guessing you already know what kind of people they are, and what their goals are?"

As long as there were people living there, this information agency will be the first to gain the overall picture of what was happening. The information agency struck 'contracts' with various types of people, obtained various kinds of information through the phone and through rumors, and paid out rewards at regular intervals. This was the setup of the information agency. All sorts of people sent them news- the top residents, the florist at the corner of the street, and even the police and Mafia members.

Keith came here having obtained full understanding of the basic groundwork of the situation, so he wasn't the slightest bit surprised by the voice coming from behind the mountain of information, and just calmly listened to him speak.

"Your enemy is a single person in the Runorata Family called Gustavo Bujetta. He's the one put in charge of entering the Manhattan scene. Of course, the Runorata Family is a large New York family with much power, but they don't have any territory in Manhattan. Manhattan is primarily controlled by five large families: large organizations from Chicago and San Francisco or organizations with even more influential supporters. They want to set foot here and have decided that they'd rather not directly conflict with these organizations. So they chose new organizations like yours with no support of other large organizations, to slowly expand once they had conquered you. Am I right so far?"

Keith didn't speak, waiting for him to continue. The speaker also seemed to be confirming this, and once again opened his mouth to the sounds of phone rings.

"Small organizations like yours with no other large organizations to rely on ended up joining the ranks of their delectable prey. Others in the same situation as you are the Martillos, but their leader came from the same village as the Runorata don, Bartolo."

There wasn't any sorrow in his words; on the contrary, they poured into Keith's ears just like flowing water.

"Gustavo is a battle maniac. Before he struck against your men, he distributed drugs on your turf, probably in order to increase your burdens. But regretfully, I don't have any reliable information about their true motives. No negotiations, no warnings and also no declarations of war beforehand, simply acting according to his own intentions. He seems to have ascended

to the executive board using these means. Just as the nail that sticks out gets hammered down, he's garnered discontent from quite a few members of the organization. Bartolo also doesn't feel that conquering the whole of Manhattan is necessary, because he knows it isn't possible for a large organization like the Runorata to completely take over the area. In other words, Gustavo is no longer useful. In reality, what appears to be a promotion is actually a demotion, only that he's not aware of it yet."

As he took down his voice by a notch, he revealed the inner workings of the Runorata Family.

"But no matter what, to the Runorata Family don, Gustavo has never been someone to be underestimated, because he's someone who has experienced the 'Night of the Sicilian Vespers'."

"Night of the Sicilian Vespers" was a pan-country incident in September of that year which caused quite a sensation- an ' extermination' orchestrated by Lucky Luciano and others. So they could establish a new Mafia system, they murdered over 30 Mafia bosses who still held onto the old school of thought. Then, they set up a Commission of 6 members to lead the newly reorganized ' Cosa Nostra'.

"Although the Runorata don still follows the old school of thought, he moves with the crowd, and continues the organization 's activities with the guidance of the 'Cosa Nostra'. That alone is enough of an indicator of his power. Just think, it'd be good if that kind of guy was backing Gustavo. But he's just there - he'll never directly help Gustavo. If you understand this, then good."

He finished speaking, and the phones suddenly ceased their racket.

“I’ve temporarily cut the phone line. So I can hear you better.”

From behind the mountain of information came the voice of the The Informer director. The curiosity in that voice was obvious.

“Now, Keith. You may even know all this. What’s next is for you to say why you came, what’s your purpose and what do you want to know? Of course, depending on the importance of the information I will charge different prices, but what you say will definitely be precious information. The last time I heard you say more than 5 words was 3 years ago. That should be during the clash with the Martillo Family. Such serene silence is really an eye-opener for me, but as long as the information is useful I’m happy!”

The voice behind the information heap suddenly stopped, and for a moment silence enveloped the entire room.

Then, Keith finally opened his mouth----------

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Gustavo was sorting through his men’s reports, when he suddenly pounded the table.

"Shit! The hell's up with this- after killing one of their bosses and mobilizing so much manpower, they didn't even touch a hair on their heads and even ended up being captured alive."

To someone who thought Luck had already died, the opposing organization's calm response was completely outside of his expectations.

That motley rabble shouldn't be hard to handle, right? And even though they found out the guy who stole the drugs, all that was left in his residence was the smell of vomit, so if this continued, he was really screwed. He initially thought he could get some credit from his boss with this, but it amounted to the same as adding another black mark to his record.

At the temporary stronghold of the organization-- in a hotel room on Wall Street, Gustavo was desperately trying to think up strategies. But the only thing on this man's mind was how he could speed up his promotion, so he wasn't able to come up with any good ideas until now. Although he really wanted to use explosives to blast away all their stores, he currently had no explosives at hand, so if he was planning to go through with this, he'd need to ask Bartolo for help- but how would he explain the failure this time?

"Damn it, there still aren't enough people? Next time I'll be sure to gather enough men to give them a vicious—"

"Are you, all, right? You, don't, look, too well."

Gustavo jolted in surprise at the sudden voice coming from behind.

"B-, Begg! Why're you here? You scared the crap outta me! Jesus!"

"Didn't, I, con, tact you, before, I came, over today? I, wanted, to, see, the ef, fective, ness, of, the drugs I, made."

"Tch! I'm very busy now, next time!"

"Can't. At, the end, of this, month, I, need, to, pick up, some, goods, from the, train, sta, tion. It's, very, heavy, so I, need to, bor, row, a few of, your men."

"You're frickkin' kidding me! I'm not that jobless… Goods? Ingredients for your drugs?"

If it was that then he couldn't take this matter lightly. But what followed shocked Gustavo.

"Something, more, trouble, some. Some, pow, erful, ex, plosives , my friend, made."

Gustavo mulled over this sentence for a long while before the meaning sank in.

---Firepower.

"Can you tell me more about it?"

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"That's the current situation- we're counting on you. Oh? You still can't predict how things will go?"

In the office in the basement of the jazz bar, Luck was giving a call to someone. The surrounding men all stood to one side, anxiously watching their boss, totally clueless as to who their boss was calling.

"So that's settled. Then, we'll be waiting for your arrival at the end of this month. Ah, it's an honor for us too."

"It's OK! He's coming here at the end of this month by train."

Berga gave a whistle and even Keith revealed a rare, faint smile.

"Now, listen, everyone. For the time being, no one is to act alone without orders. Post notices on all casinos and bars saying ' Closed due to renovations'. No one is to show their faces without receiving orders- lay low and stay underground. Do you understand?"

Some executives excluded, the men became restless at being issued such an order so suddenly.

"Excuse me…"

As though representing everyone, Tick asked, puzzled,

"Just who, who is coming?"

"Aah, yes. If I don't tell you, everyone won't be able to take it lying down. My apologies."

Very different from how he was normally, Luck couldn't conceal his glee and slowly said a name.

"The legendary, no. 1 freelance assassin in this world, 'Vino'… … Claire Stanfield."

Use

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29th December 1931

"The developments of this situation thus far are truly growing ever more interesting."

Behind this mountain of information came a low, subdued voice . Inside the Director's Suite of the newspaper agency stood a few people, including Nicholas, Elean and Henry. After hearing all the reports, the director summed up the current situation.

"Elean told Miss Eve Genoard the name of the Gandor Family, I informed the Gandors about the inner workings of the Runoratas, Nicholas sold information regarding Roy Maddock to the Runorata Family, am I right? How about your side, Henry? I heard Roy came looking for you."

"I'm very sorry, because we couldn't settle on a price, there was no deal, so he left *without* buying *any* information."

As Henry stammered, he was secretly grinning a crafty, sly grin .

"Really, then nothing can be done about it. Nicholas, send someone to check on Miss Lia's situation. That black case will certainly become the 'trump card' that determines victory."

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"---That bastard!"

Edith fumed angrily.

After she passed that black case to Lia, Edith quickly headed to work at the Gandor Family's bar. When she arrived at the bar, she discovered that the bar had been attacked while she was running late. Although she didn't know who did it, it was very likely that those Runorata Family folks were responsible.

Because she was late, she'd avoided a calamity. After cleaning up the bar with everyone else, they started business as usual. By the time it was time for her to get off work, the sun was already up , and just as she got home--

"That useless idiot, always causing me more trouble! What was he thinking…?"

Edith gripped a note Roy left behind in her hand.

Written on it was stuff like how he didn't want her to get involved, how he'd take responsibility for everything, how he won 't return until this incident was resolved, and so on.

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"Can't- can't be here, can it?"

Far from Mulberry Street, the environment at Central Park along the 5th Avenue was of the likes Roy rarely saw. Other than to use the railway station in the vicinity, he had never visited this place before. But it was also one of the reasons why Roy, who hated capitalists, avoided this area.

Packed with high-class mansions, it was a veritable forest of villas owned by multimillionaires and high-class offices, so it was commonly referred to as the 'Millionaires' Row'.

Wearing clothes that did not match up to the area, Roy could clearly sense his own inferiority. He had successfully found the villa using the address Henry had given him. Although it was a little smaller than the surrounding mansions, it was definitely not one for the ordinary family. When comparing its classical style to the others, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that it was a little more luxurious. That building was the original Genoard family's residence— now it had become the secondary residence, and also served as one of the symbols of the Genoard family's wealth.

"So, she lives here."

Although he reached the door, Roy hadn't the foggiest idea on how to proceed. As things were now, he obviously couldn't just stroll in; even if he saw her, what should he say? He had also thought of barging in, but that'd just be as the last resort. Furthermore, a young lady living in such a luxurious villa surely must have hired fierce personal bodyguards. So at the very least he needed to wait until she was alone, or until she was a little distance away from this area…

In the meantime, unable to come up with better plans, Roy could only circle the house several times as he continued inspecting the grounds.

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"Ooh, Miss! Are you feeling well today?"

"Yes, Mr. Benjamin. Although I'm still a little tired, it's nothing to worry about. I'm really sorry, creating more trouble for you."

"Balderdash! If something really happened, I, Benjamin, am willing to scoop out my own heart, if that is what's required for Miss's recovery. This is our duty."

"What're you saying? It's not some satanic ritual."

Eve laughed softly, with a heart filled with determination.

--Find them. Find the Gandors. Then, I must discover the truth. If Brother is really dead, if it's at all possible, my brother's revenge must be —

She wasn't thinking of killing people, but at the very least she wished for the police to arrest them all. At this point, another thought occurred to her.

--If Brother Dallas was really killed by them, then the ones who killed Father and Big Brother must also be--

Their car had sunk in New York Bay. It was unknown whether it was a homicide or an accident. Mangled bodies.

Everything gushed forth from her heart, at last coalescing into resolution.

Wishes and prayers could no longer call them back.

So, she could only rely on her own power.

That was the repayment she had to make to her brother.

If she shared these thoughts with Benjamin and Samasa, they were bound to stop her and say 'let us deal with it'. That won't do! This was her own sacrifice.

If she was killed by those Gandors, Benjamin and Samasa would definitely be devastated, right? If that really did come to pass, then dying a senseless death here was the same as betraying them.

At this point, Eve's heart ached as if it had been slashed with a knife, but her determination wasn't so simple as to be undone by that. In other words, it would be best if she didn't die.

Although Eve knew that it was no easy task, a bringing-up in a sheltered world meant she could never have imagined the extent of the terror and cruelty Mafia were capable of.

The original plan was to return to New Jersey at the beginning of next month. Thus, no matter how, she had to see the Gandors before then. That was her one and only goal, and nothing else.

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A few 'visitors' arrived at the restaurant where Gustavo and his men were.

"Ah, so this is the current state of affairs. We beseech you, Mr. Gustavo. Mr. Bartolo is one of our most esteemed and respected customers. Please do not cause him trouble."

Leaving these mocking words hanging in the air, the visitors left the restaurant. Gustavo gritted his teeth, firmly suppressing his rage as he sent them on their way.

"Fuck you! You arrogant dicks…"

The few people who had visited were representatives of Manhattan's Five Families. Their words echoed unendingly in Gustavo's mind.

"Ah, we came here today for just one reason, and that's to give you a little warning."

"You were a bit too reckless yesterday."

"It doesn't matter what you do to the Gandors and the Martillos . However---"

"Please bear in mind that that place acts as the only 'border' where our territories meet —"

"If there is even the slightest disturbance on our territories, we will treat this as a challenge against us."

"We won't wage war with you, but we will submit our protests to your boss, Mr. Bartolo. If this happens, what will happen to your standing? I believe you are well aware about this?"

"All incidents will be treated with equal weighting, even the tiniest ones. Even if the Gandors enter our territory, we won't permit any action on our territory."

"There are only three areas where you can do as you wish. The Gandor territory, the Martillo territory, and- and the DD Newspaper Agency. Just these three places. The police headquarters at the back is also fine."

"The DD Newspaper Agency is neutral, or at least in theory it is ."

"Originally, we wouldn't have recommended that you touch these three areas."

"Us and Mr. Bartolo aside, where do you stand, Mr. Gustavo?"

"Do you know why we've never set foot in these three territories?"

"Of course, if we wanted to, we could mow them down anytime ."

"It's just that we don't want to disrupt the existing balance. Ah, the DD Newspaper Agency is an exception."

"Now that you've mentioned it, you can say that that place acts as a public facility for us Mafia."

"Even we don't know when there started being an information shop."

"But it was certainly around before we came."

"Our bosses, and also Mr. Bartolo, frequently use that place to assist in obtaining reliable information."

"But you won't be able to. It's best if you don't bother The Informer after all."

"In any case, the most important thing is to not bring any trouble to our doorstep."

"Also, your 'new drug' must definitely not appear on our territory, so please manage your men well."

"We've already spoken to Mr. Begg about the new drug, and it has nothing to do with you."

"Please take care not to release more than the agreed quantities of drugs onto the market."

"We don't really expect much from you, so look out for yourself !"

"We just want to maintain friendly relations with Mr. Bartolo. Not you, please get that right."

"You best reconsider the notion of 'controlling' this piece of land by yourself."

"In other words, what we want to say is--- 'think of the consequences before you act'."

"You sons of bitches… did ya come here just to insult me?"

Although he was pissed enough to want to wring their bodies, his opponents were simply too powerful. In addition, he could tell that they sincerely respected his boss, Mr. Bartolo, with all their heart. But why would they want to insult a subordinate like him? Did they not acknowledge him as a member of the Runorata Family?

If he forced his hand, he feared it would develop into a personal feud and degenerate into fighting. But he wanted them to know at the very least that he was working on the behalf of Bartolo, otherwise the end result would be the same.

"You better watch out… once we're done with the Gandor Family, the next ones are damn well gonna be you!"

Suppressing the intense fury burning in his heart, Gustavo's resentment towards the Gandor Family only grew stronger.

"Those fucking Gandor asses will pay for all the humiliation I've taken today."

His mind focused on such petty matters, Gustavo picked up the ashtray and hurled it at the wall.

<==>

30th December 1931 Night

The underground casino on Martillo territory. As the overseer of the casino, Firo continued listening to the foolish chatter of someone who had lost every single cent on his body: Berga.

"Say, Firo, can't you make these roulettes easier to score?"

"You dare say such things on other people's territory?"

It was very rare for bosses of other territories to come to this kind of setting.

The three brothers of the Gandor Family and Firo had grown up in the same apartment. Despite this, if it concerned the conflict of interests between organizations, they wouldn't let their personal feelings interfere with their decisions.

"Berga, what kind of times do you think these are? You still dare to come to this place like this? I heard you've already reached the point with the Runorata Family where just a spark is enough to set you off."

The news had already spread to the Martillos? This was just something that happened yesterday.

"You see, if we hid on our own territory it's likely we'll be attacked, but if we're at the Martillos, then the Runorata guys definitely won't come over."

"Go home. Don't drag us in as well."

As Firo spoke matter-of-factly, he led the cheater he had spotted out back. His conversation with Berga continued only when he was free again.

At the sudden mention of the name, Firo's expression immediately changed.

"Claire, is it that Claire?"

"Is there any other Claire than that Claire?"

"I see… you look very happy huh. Is that guy really coming? Then the Runorata Family will lose for sure!"

Firo nodded nonstop, already predicting the disaster Claire's existence would bring to the Runorata Family.

"What, it's not set in stone."

"They definitely will. That genius assassin is coming back. Nowadays, there's not a single person on the street who doesn't know the name 'Vino'. If you still lose like with a guy like him, then you're just too stupid."

From behind the two men who were conversing excitedly, a man slowly approached. He drew a small, long needle from his tie, and stabbed at Berga's heart and back without any warning whatsoever. But—

"Anyhow—"

A hand suddenly extended from the side, clamping down on the man's arm. One hand grabbed the man's elbow and the other gripped his other shoulder. In the blink of an eye, the man's body had done a 180 degree turn and he fell to the floor, his face looking up to the ceiling.

The man groaned as a foot stomped down mercilessly on his chest. The impact immediately transmitted to his eyes, not even giving the man time to cry out.

"I can't stand retards who attempt murder on my turf. Take him back!"

"Aah, yeah. Then, excuse me!"

Hearing Firo's words, Berga dipped his head with a menacing look, picked up the man and left the casino.

"Honestly, that smile of Tick's gonna appear again."

When he saw Tick's innocent, smiling face in his mind's eye, Berga couldn't help but feel sorry for this guy.

Even so, the choice of 'forgiveness' had never been an option from the very start.

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"Found that Roy bastard yet?"

Gustavo's eyes lit up momentarily, but immediately narrowed in discontent.

"Then, why didn't you capture him?"

Questioned by his superior, the subordinate stammered,

"Um, he's currently in 'Millionaires' Row', which isn't Gandor territory."

"Blundering fools! Are you really scared of those kinds of threats?"

"B-, but Mr. Gustavo, it's really bad, we were discovered when we were looking for Roy… Of course, we weren't very conspicuous. Then five black-suited guys appeared, saying 'this isn't your play area, wanna help us? We'll pay you money'!"

"Then, you snuck back just like that?"

"No, um, we left someone to continue surveillance. Roy doesn't seem to be related with the people of that territory. But those guys are a real pain- they recorded all our features and even watched us , although from afar! Such a pain in the ass, those guys are real idiots, *ugh ohhh*…"

The poor man hadn't even finished speaking and a large stone ashtray was already sent flying at him.

"So what if they do that? You shitty scumbags, you're just saying we're idiots!"

As he spoke, Gustavo continued punching and kicking the already-unconscious man.

"Scumbags… you sons of bitches."

Seeing Gustavo fly into a rage, all the underlings quickly looked away. The only one who didn't notice the looks was just the berserk Gustavo.

"Out! All of you, out!"

The moment the underlings heard the order, they quickly left the room but forgot to report the most important detail. Or perhaps they intentionally left it out.

Roy was discovered right in front of the Genoard family's villa.

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31st December 1931 Afternoon Close to the Pennsylvania Station [Note]

In a small alleyway not far from the station, the three brothers of the Gandor Family were discussing something with a young man.

"Well, let's go. Who should I kill first? I could only do some light exercise last night, so my body feels rusty. I want to do a job where I can get serious for once."

This young man said freely to the head of the Mafia family.

Claire Stanfield. Although he grew up under the same roof as the three Gandor brothers, he wasn't an actual member of the Gandor Family. He was a freelance assassin, with a nickname ' Vino', a powerhouse with a mighty reputation among the criminal society. Even assassins would run into many problems if they didn 't conceal their real name, and yet he didn't think that other people learning of his name would become a hindrance.

If one had to pinpoint a problem of his, then it would be his eccentric personality. The exact opposite of killing for enjoyment and breathing lies like air, it was the kind of personality that walked the line between being normal and abnormal.

So when he met up with the three Gandor brothers again today, he spoke about many bizarre things. Originally they thought he still wanted to delve deeper into the topic, but he immediately started walking briskly towards the headquarters of the Gandor Family, as though in a hurry.

"Let's hurry and get this done and over with. After this, I have to look for somebody. Somebody who might marry me, ya know."

Hearing Claire's words, the three brothers exchanged a look.

"You rascal, did you say something like 'marry me' again to someone you met the first time?"

"Something like that."

"Something like what, you idiot! How many times do you think you've been dumped?"

In response to the words of an astounded Berga, Claire immediately retorted without any hesitation whatsoever,

"Heeey wait a sec, I wasn't joking, nor was I trying to pick them up. It shouldn't be a problem since I'm serious. And the reason why I've been refused every time until now is definitely because there's a better woman waiting for me in the future. Because, well, this world--"

"'Revolves around me', am I right?"

Luck cut into the conversation at this point, as he always does. This was likely to be Claire's most basic thought. According to him , 'if I died, then this world is just a dream, and I'll just have to continue dreaming this dream in the real world. That's the way it is'. Of course, Luck and the others didn't understand the slightest what this meant.

These sentences were enough to prove he was a man escaping from reality, but he did possess the power to make his dream real. To maintain this power, he worked at it constantly and never slacked off. This was the part of him that gave people the most headaches.

"In any case, Mr. Claire, what I'm trying to say is that you shouldn't trust a woman who accepts sudden proposals."

Unintentionally, Luck called out Claire's name. But Claire proceeded to say another baffling line.

"Claire's dead. He no longer exists on official records anyway."

---*Again with this baffling talk.* At this, Luck said calmly,

“People who don’t exist officially can’t get married.”

Hearing that, Claire’s footsteps stopped abruptly.

"Aw crap, what should I do? How do I buy a name?"

"I don’t really understand your logic, Mr. Claire. Well then, what should we call you?"

Claire resumed walking, as if nothing of importance was mentioned.

"Well, ‘Vino’---------- or you can call me ‘Rail Tracer'.”

“Lame!”

Luck watched with a somewhat stunned expression as Claire and Berga fought and argued loudly in an alleyway, then drew in a deep breath.

---*What a wonderful pair of brothers these two fellows are.*

Just as he thought that, Berga’s tooth came flying over. Seeing the tooth return to Berga’s body to regenerate, Luck broke out in a cold sweat and pretended he had seen nothing.

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“Ye old geeza, walk propahly!”

Gazing at Samasa, who was raising a big fuss, Benjamin intentionally coughed twice.

“It’s all right to pay no attention to such a boorish person. Oh my, Miss, let’s leave quickly.”

“Eh? Ah, yes."

The steward’s words shook Eve out of her reverie. Because she was musing over something, she simply didn’t notice the two’s antics.

--Aah, how will I be able to meet the Gandors?

“Miss, you don’t have to worry.”

“?”

For a moment, Eve was dumbfounded by what the steward had said. Did they know what she was thinking?

“Just as I thought, the food that Samasa and I prepare for you is making you lose your appetite, is that right? I’ve already contacted a banquet organizer who is a friend of mine yesterday, and

requested that he introduce another chef as well as a bartender. They're coming here on a train today, and I believe they'll arrive tomorrow."

"Ah, ah, they even had to specially travel here! And, a bartender…"

The old steward already knew that Eve would ask this question, and so answered with a mischievous smile,

"Under this estate, I discovered a wine store that was here prior to the Prohibition, so I was looking for someone who could manage such a large quantity of wine. Merely 'possessing' wine isn't a crime. And since we have a bar and since it's such a rare occasion for us to come to New York, we thought we should at least let Miss experience that kind of atmosphere. I will pay the wages. Please forgive your humble Benjamin's willfulness."

"Mr. Benjamin."

"So duncha get all worked o'er the muhney for hirin' the chef. Right, Miz, we ken now focus on more import'nt things!"

Samasa said with a smile as she patted Benjamin's back.

"That's right! *Hem hem*. An extra person means extra manpower . The domestic affairs can be left to him, and we can concentrate on finding out news about young Master Dallas."

--*These two clearly aren't people who can be dealt with half-heartedly*.

They truly cared a great deal about her. For no reason, Eve found herself fighting back tears.

"Thank you, Mr. Benjamin and Ms. Samasa, really, thank you very much!"

Faced with her two benefactors, she decided she couldn't allow herself to make anymore headstrong decisions. But that decision could no longer be changed.

When Eve and the others had finished their purchases and were on the way back to Millionaires' Row, there was a hubbub in front of a general store.

"Hey, hey, bro, you're really gonna buy it all?"

"That's right! Put all of it into the car!"

"Buying all of it! It's a monopoly!"

The ones speaking to the shopkeeper were a man wearing the ragged clothes of a Western shooter and a young woman in a big, red dress.

"No, no, of course I'm glad you're buying it all, but, just what're you gonna do with this stuff?"

"Knock it down!"

"Knock it down, knock it down!"

Watching the distant couple speaking such mystifying things, Eve seemed to recall something.

--*Aah, that's it.*

It suddenly came back to Eve- they looked very similar to those two. The ones who turned up in her own home a year ago, the thief-couple who brought her happiness.

Then, walking into the crowds, their figures quickly vanished from sight.

Although she wasn't certain these two and those thieves were the same people, but a little spark of hope lit up in Eve's heart.

Now, they had to be bringing some other people happiness.

Thoughts of the incident a year ago and her happiest memories to date awoke at the same time.

Tears filled Eve's eyes, and she became more certain of her own choice.

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"It's, been, a while. Have you, been, well?"

Standing in a bypath leading to the train station, two people were conversing.

"Yeah, Begg doesn't look too bad either."

Meeting Begg was an old friend of his.

"H-have you, have you met Maiza?"

Facing the shadowed figure that asked the question, Begg gave a light nod of his head. Compared to Begg, who was positively beaming, that shadow seemed a little sad.

"Begg, actually—"

"I heard. The, goods appear, to, have, been stolen."

"—Yeah. Those explosives can't be made public- they mustn't fall into the hands of the police."

"Of, course."

"Will I still be hunted? By the Runorata Family…"

Watching the shadow who seemed a little anxious, Begg smiled a little and shook his head.

"Barto, lo, wasn't, in, volved at, all, in this, inci, dent. I paid, for, ev, erything. You won't, be, punished."

The shadow seemed a little surprised at such a response.

"Why—"

"I, heard, about your, situation, from, the, in, forma, tion shop. I , wanted to, help you, but, couldn't, direct, ly, give you, the, money ."

Hearing these words, the shadow's expression twisted up.

"You're such a good person- you haven't changed at all. Thank you—"

"You're, too, kind. I know, but, ever, since, I gave, up, being, an, alche, mist, all, I've had, to date, is, just, money. The, happi, ness, I, was, seeking, still hasn't, been found. All, that's left, I, can do, is, to , make, you smile, like, that."

On the brightly smiling face of the shadow, a trace of sorrow surfaced in those eyes.

"That's plenty enough. Thank you!"

The shadow and Begg embraced, and Begg used his left hand to stroke the shadow's hair.

"Thank you, Begg. For—for not eating me."

Watching the shadow smile faintly as tears streamed down his face, Begg couldn't help but also cry.

"If, you, talk about, this, next, time, I'll get, angry."

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"Oh, has Berga become stronger? He didn't get hurt after a fight with me."

Claire said with surprise. There was no trace of the big fight the two just had. Berga was immortal, so he had regenerative powers, while Claire on the other hand had simply come away unscathed.

Keith and the three others had returned to the office, and there was no one inside besides Tick. Of course, everyone had received the command and was waiting at home for further orders.

"Then, let's get to the meat of it. Who should we kill? If it was Bartolo, then it'll require a fair bit of planning. If it's Gustavo, then doing it by today is OK!"

"Being meticulous, I see."

"Bartolo's hired me a few times before. That Gustavo guy doesn 't know a thing about me."

"…Aren't assassins supposed to keep their clients' identities secret?"

"Hahaha, Luck still hasn't changed, as finicky as ever. Ah, doesn't matter. You won't tell others, yeah?"

Luck, as the representative, explained the plan to the excited Claire.

"Then, Claire. First-- don't do anything. Ah, before I contact you , please go have a stroll around this city."

"What?"

Facing Claire, who had a somewhat confused look on his face, Luck narrowed his eyes as though scheming something.

"First, display your 'suppressive power'."

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At the same time, in a room of a hotel, Gustavo was beside himself with rage.

"You're fucking kidding me, Begg! They've been stolen and you 're just gonna forget about it!? I was looking forward to getting your bombs!"

"The, product, tion, process, has, been, given to me. One, month , and, I can, manu, facture, a batch."

"That's too late! Fuck! I want to blow up every bloody Gandor bar, casino and racetrack- now!"

"Is, that so?"

"Cut the crap! It's useless now! Seriously! Your friend's a fat-ass loser, huhh?"

Atypically of the usual Begg, he came up to Gustavo upon hearing such words.

"!? Wh-, what?"

"Don't, insult, my, friend."

He just said this one sentence and shut his mouth. Intimidated by Begg's imposing manner for a moment, Gustavo clenched his fists unconsciously and forced out a line past his constricted throat.

"Ha! What's up with that? For a businessman to lose the goods he's trading- doesn't that make him a downright trashy businessman!"

When he heard this, Begg was silent for a second, then burst into laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Really, it's just, as you, said! I, haven't, laughed, like, this, in, a while!"

With that, Begg turned and left the room.

"What's up with that guy?!"

Gustavo didn't understand the real meaning behind Begg's actions, and just savored the words he said.

For a businessman to lose the goods he's trading- doesn't that make him a downright trashy businessman!

Drugs. Roy. Theft. Responsible person. Me.

"Huh?"

He finally realized why Begg laughed, and hurled the third ashtray at the window.

"So he was laughing at me-------!"

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That night, the executives held a reporting conference in the information shop.

"The most notable information today has to be the incident on the 'Flying Pussyfoot' Rachel took. It also seems Congressman Beriam is hiding something. I've confirmed with a friend from the railway company on the phone, but the information we've gathered isn't complete. The question is about the 'red monster' Rachel saw aboard the train- I'm very interested about this.

Because it seems the assassin 'Vino' was also on the train, so if we can talk to him, we should be able to get a good handle on the information regarding this incident."

"Vino…… Are we talking about Claire Stanfield? Shouldn't he have died in the conductor's room?"

Nicholas's question was answered with absolute certainty by the voice behind the mountain of information.

"This is just a hunch, but, well. It's probably someone else. The face was destroyed and burned- this is the first step of the pretence . It appears it was done by that careless guy. Seeing as she, a freeloader, has already been released, she should have obtained the ticket from a certain someone. Stealing the ticket from the dead can't explain why they let her off the hook so easily."

"In that case, the only people with spare tickets would be the conductors."

The person behind the information mountain agreed with Elean .

"That's right, but both conductors are dead. From this point of view, it's probable that she met Claire, and was threatened into keeping mum about this incident. She's very particular about this kind of stuff."

After a pause, he added his own thoughts regarding Claire.

"And, I don't believe he'd be killed so easily- there isn't anyone who can kill him. Whether it's the Ronny of the Martillo Family, or Chane of the Lemures."

He listed a few other names as examples, then finally reached the name of the person who was 'bound to be mentioned'.

"Or— Felix Walken of the 'Freelancers'. If it were him, there's a high possibility he would win. Ah, but I've heard he's already retired from assassination scene."

"Felix Walken? He's still in this city?"

Nicholas looked astonished at the sudden mention of this name.

"Aye, seems like because of his newly born daughter, he wants to abandon his past… Speaking of which, his most influential work in Manhattan back in the days would probably be opposing Lucky Luciano's subordinate – Albert Anastasia's 'Murder Incorporated'. How can such a person retire when he wants to?"

The director immediately switched topics, to the Runorata-related incident.

"---So that's that. Back to what we were saying- Nicholas, how's that black case?"

After sorting out the entire day's activities, the director started checking for any information he had yet to be notified about.

"There aren't any problems. Only that two men went to Lia Linshan's room. I think it should be her younger brother who had just arrived today, Fan Linshan."

"They're both Chinese? What strange names!"

"Their father was British, so perhaps that's why. But perhaps due to some miscommunication, she and her younger brother had a dispute."

"And the other man?"

"We haven't confirmed it yet, but he should be a young man traveling with her younger brother, called Jon Panel."

"Very detailed- you were able to find out so quickly?"

"Ah, no no no— They were both personnel aboard the 'Flying Pussyfoot', so this is just a lucky coincidence."

The executives nodded their agreement. Finally, the director said,

"Then, Nicholas will send people to watch them. Our priority now is to grasp the 'ceaseless movements'. Do you still remember the 'wine of immortality' from last year? The incident where everything was coincidentally centered around the wine. Ah, the movement of 'wine' then wasn't fully predictable. Compared to that, the movements this time have been observable from the very start, so it's not difficult."

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"What should I do?"

Sitting in a first-floor room of a small apartment block in Little Italy, Lia Linshan gazed at the black leather case, looking troubled.

Although good friend Edith let me take care of this on her behalf, I can' t always keep it in this room that can't be locked. But I can't send it to the police station either- I should find some safer place to store it.

Although Edith said 'you entrust it to someone trustworthy', I'm still not sure who to pass it to. Although it'd be best to hand it over to Ronny and Maiza, Edith said 'you must keep it a secret from the people in the organization', so that won't work either.

It's still better to entrust it to Ennis. As the thought occurred to her, Lia picked up the leather case, when a knocking sounded on the door.

For a moment, she was frightened, but the voice that came next lit up her heart.

"It's been a while— It's me, Sister."

It was the voice of her younger brother who should be living far , far away.

"Ah, sorry for the trouble…"

Her younger brother and the young man traveling with him seemed to be planning to stay the night here.

He said something about suddenly losing his job on the dining car of a train, and that from tomorrow onwards he'd be staying with a rich family in Millionaires' Row for work.

"Eeh? You're going to live in their house?"

"Yes. All the luggage can be taken there, and they even have safes, so I brought over all the valuables with no worries---"

Hearing his words, Lia's troubles could finally be put to a rest.

Because someone who she could trust and had a safe place had appeared, just like that.

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1932 New Year's Day

"What to do… Roy, you bastard, just where'd you go?"

The past few days, Edith had been searching non-stop for Roy's whereabouts.

From a distance, Roy's residence looked like it was completely surrounded by the Mafia lackeys. Roy also didn't seem to have been stupid enough to return there. Which, at the same time, meant that Roy hadn't been caught.

Clinging onto her only hope, Edith knocked on the door of the legendary The Informer. Behind the door with a plaque saying ' Daily Days', a few editorial staff were hurrying about, as if New Year's Day had nothing to do with them.

"You've come a long way. Welcome to The Informer."

The one greeting her at the beginning was a 'man with a beaming face that repelled people'. Although she had some regrets after opening the door, it was already too late to go back.

"Are you here to subscribe? Or to enquire about 'information'?"

Faced with the sincere-looking man, Edith nervously blurted out the word 'information'.

"In that case, please come this way. My name is Henry. From now on, let's get along."

That smile on the reception man's face became even more repugnant. He led Edith to the reception room.

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At the same time, within the Director's Suite, Nicholas was speaking to the director.

"That fellow, Henry, must be hiding something!"

"I know. He was never any good at lying."

"That fellow has no problems when it comes to collecting and providing information, it's just that sometimes he's a little too keen , so he gets rather annoying."

"He still hasn't fully comprehended the 'risks' of information. Once he experiences that risk, I believe this quirk of his would be restrained."

The voice coming deep within the information was tangled with an undercurrent of complicated feelings.

"If at all possible, I hope that none of my employees would ever undergo such an experience. After all, 'information' was born for this very purpose."

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It was because of my love for manipulating information that I chose this line of business. My impression of information shops in the past was nothing more than the secretive exchange of information in alleys or bars. But I never thought that such a ‘ daring’ information shop still existed in this world.

By manipulating information, one can also manipulate other things connected to it. Sometimes it's money, sometimes people, sometimes life, sometimes the city- it's even possible to manipulate the country and the world.

It's such a delight, grasping all these ‘destinies’ in my hand! The most recent, trendy drugs are nothing compared to this. You only have to keep your wits about yourself at all times to be able to simulate the experience of becoming this world’s ‘god’.

This firm is also the same. The only person possessing information regarding the Runoratas and Gandors, as well as the fact that Roy is currently searching for Eve, is just me. This incident actually arose from a circle of tight relationships. I alone possess this information. One could say, in this ‘world’ that had become embroiled in this incident, I stand on a more advantageous ground than anyone else.

Despite this, that guy called Roy is already under the control of my information, so, even more so than before, I can't stop myself. Until now, thanks to Nicholas, Elean and the director, my plans have never really been able to kick off, but this time I must definitely give it my all.

What a useless fool. How can a young girl like her possibly know about the drug factories? How can she become a witness? In other words, even if he contacted her and succeeded in tricking her into threatening the Runorata Family, the Family ultimately would wipe out this information. Even if he escaped from the Runorata Family, he would end up the suspect of kidnapping. There simply won't be any proof linked to this newspaper agency, nor did I undergo any trade, because ‘that was just me talking to myself’.

Of course, if that guy had the money, I'd proceed with legitimate business, and during that time I'd control him by playing the part of a businessman. After all, this guy would just end up destroyed by drugs and become the scum of society no matter what happens.

Truly, he's a guy I detest with a passion. So I simply want to teach him a little lesson.

There are no problems whatsoever. Nope, none, none.

And now appearing on our doorstep as a client is this woman.

Is she Roy’s girlfriend, Edith? Now the situation is becoming more interesting. I really want to see how this guy’s destiny would turn out.

Controlling the destinies of a pair of lovers at the same time. This is a delight unrivalled by any before.

"I certainly know of Mr. Roy's whereabouts."

"Really?"

"In fact, I had a chance to speak to him *in person* a few days ago __"

As I recount the 'entire' conversation I had with Roy, her face becomes whiter and whiter. It's just such a delight watching her.

"Wait a minute…? Then, what's Roy doing?"

"I suppose he's doing something to Miss Eve around now? *I tried to stop him*, believe me, *I tried*."

"If we don't stop him…"

Seeing Edith scramble to her feet, Henry spluttered,

"May I ask where you're headed? You don't know the location of Miss Eve's residence, do you?"

Hearing his words, Edith gave Henry a savage glare.

"Please tell me. I'll pay you! Whatever the cost!"

As she spoke, she hurled her purse on the table, yet Henry shook his head.

"You wish to stop him? Actually, this is the only path left to him. Even if the probabilities were lower…"

"I don't think so. Didn't you just say, because Roy had no money he could only choose this path? That's to say, if proper payment was made, you would provide us 'formal information', is that right?"

"I've always admired people with character!"

Henry looked a little displeased as he tossed Edith's purse back to her.

"Do you honestly think that information on escaping from the Runorata Family is something people like you and Roy can so easily get your hands on? Please, don't fool yourself."

Henry slowly rose from his chair, drawing his face closer to Edith's. His tone and gaze had changed in an instant, becoming like that of a god or a demon that ruled this world.

"Information is power. If you want to obtain it, isn't it natural to pay a certain reward? So powerless people ought to die. That's also natural. Power; that is the reward— how can folk with no claim to money so easily obtain something as good as information? "

Then, abruptly switching back to his original tone, he sat back heavily on the chair.

"---So there you go. Is everything clear now?"

Edith gazed at Henry and said determinedly,

“Then, let me ask you. What’s an example of information we would use to ‘exchange information’?”

Henry gave a smug shrug of his shoulders and, after a moment’s consideration--- he thought of last night’s meeting and said with a smile,

“The incident that happened yesterday on the ‘Flying Pussyfoot’, do you know about it?”

“In other words, in order to understand the important parts of the situation, we can’t do without the information that assassin ‘Vino’ holds--- his ‘testimony’, if you will.”

At this point, Henry drew in a deep breath.

“Ah, I told you earlier, I’ll tell you in exchange for the assassin called ‘Vino’. About the location of Miss Eve’s residence, and also about the way to escape from the Runorata Family.”

“Really? Then it’s a deal!”

Watching Edith about to depart without any delay, Henry suddenly asked another question.

“Why, why go to such an extent?”

"Because we promised. That guy spent a long time to keep his promise. But I don't have anymore time. Because if I don't hurry, that guy'll die. That's all."

"? Is that really it?"

"That's the way promises are, right? You can't regret them no matter what."

She didn't even glance back, and opened the door with a resolute look in her eyes.

"I heard it all. You ass!"

A sudden voice exclaimed from behind, and Henry jolted in surprise.

"Have you no shame? You best be prepared for a cut in your salary!"

"Nic-, Nicholas."

Henry whirled around, only to see the frowning English edition editor, who had at some point stood himself by the door at the back of the reception room.

"Wait, wait please. About Roy- because he had no money, I just gave him an alternative plan—"

"Oh? Then why didn't you report that?"

"I felt it wasn't within the field of our work."

"Then, in that case, it's you who didn't work seriously!"

Nicholas grabbed Henry's collar, and for a moment Henry sensed he would be given a beating. But the fist never came, and the hand gripping the collar unexpectedly let go.

"But since you were ultimately fighting for justice, I'll forgive you. But what you've done is utterly inelegant. The Director was too lenient on you- now two incidents will cancel out each other."

"???"

Watching Henry, Nicholas once again frowned.

"Eh? Can it be you don't know what I'm talking about? ……I see."

Nicholas gave Henry a pitying look, and turned to return back to his own seat.

"How pitiful! Ah, at least now I understand what the 'risks' the Director spoke about are. Only those who've experienced situations of life-and-death will mature greatly. You need to be careful, don't really get killed."

Henry, alone now, simply didn't understand Nicholas's intentions, and a great sense of unease settled over him.

--Just what was that about? Geez, the incompetence of the people who can't obtain information!

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With the solid determination that came with preparedness to face death, Edith reached the Gandor Family's office.

As she walked down the stairs leading to the basement, she once again reassessed her own thinking. *Of the ones around me, the only people who might know information about assassins are just the three Gandor brothers. Or perhaps this isn't possible at all- but now I can only try my luck.*

However, if I want to ask them about that, then I'll have no choice but to tell the truth about everything. In that case, there's a possibility I'll be killed there and then, or, after helping Roy, be killed together with him. But, as long as there is that thread of possibility, I can't give up.

I can also choose to escape with Roy from this city, but Roy will miss his family and friends he'll be leaving behind. He'll agree if I forcefully persuaded him, but he'll definitely regret it for the rest of his life.

Deciding to become the shield against guns and bullets, Edith, in full awareness that she may die, descended the stairs step by step.

"Ah— Edith— Welcome—"

She only saw Tick sat at the side of the central table, whiling away free time. Who was the man sitting opposite him? Then, when she looked closer, there seemed to be some things laid out before Tick and the man. They were the numerous pairs of new scissors, shining and gleaming brightly.

"Not bad, aren't they? I bought a lot. They're very sharp!"

Tick said with a child-like smile.

The man opposite him stretched out a hand towards the table and picked up a pair of scissors.

Kann, kann, shukoo, kann, kan, kan, shuko, kan, shukokan shukokan shukakaka kakakakakakaka kakakakakakakakakakakakakaka---

The tip of the scissors danced a quick tempo, back and forth and back, stabbing between the five fingers over and over again. They danced- rhythmically, powerfully. The tempo picked up until, in the end, the scissors were so fast only their after-images could be seen.

More incredibly, one would discover on closer inspection that *every time* the man thrust down the scissors, *the blades would snip open and shut*.

"Wow! Amazing, amazing— I want to try too!"

"It's better if you don't. If you get hurt, it'll be very painful. Very painful indeed."

"Then I'm better off not trying after all. That's right, the next time I'm interrogating someone, I'll test it on them!"

Hearing the two's conversation, a chill trickled down the line of Edith's spine.

--From the looks of this, there are scarier things than 'death'……

She faltered for just an instant, but it was too late.

"Mr. Keith— Mr. Berga— Mr. Luck--. Edith's here!"

Hearing Tick's call, the silhouettes of the three brothers appeared at the door.

"Oh my— Edith. What's the matter? Aah, the bar should have suspended business now, but wages will be issued as usual—"

"No, no, Mr. Gandor. That's not it."

There was no turning back. To save Roy, her feet were already drawing her towards hell one step at a time.

"I… I've betrayed Mr. Gandor."

Hearing Edith's confession, a troubled expression appeared momentarily on the three men's faces— after a glance at his older brothers, Luck opened his mouth to speak.

"We understand what you've said, Edith. Honestly, it's a genuine pity that you didn't keep your word. However, even if we 're very sorry, we don't plan to find out the current whereabouts of Mr. Roy."

Edith's expression brightened at the answer.

"Really!?"

"Ah, Mr. Roy isn't one of us. Frankly speaking, the organization 's rule regarding people we've never seen before is to not to use them. Although we don't allow drugs on our turf, we really can't control what goes on behind our backs."

At this point, Luck's smile had already been wiped from his face.

"But, Edith, the problem is you! You clearly knew we forbade drugs and yet you still hid the truth. Even though you're just a waitress at our bar, but as 'one of us', this is an act of betrayal."

Aah, that was certainly the case. I was already prepared for that, so even if I was killed, I still hoped Roy would be all right!

"Then, about how to deal with you— Frankly speaking, this is unprecedented. What should we do… What to do? Brothers?"

Luck asked his two brothers standing behind him; Berga said ‘ This, that, what to do?’ as he looked at Keith, while Keith too seemed to be in a dilemma, lowering his head to play with the poker cards in his hand.

The three stood a little distance away, quietly discussing what to do with her.

“What to do?”

“Don’t ask me. What normally happens?”

“In Sicily, traitors are executed… But this isn’t the same.”

“Killing someone just over something like this is really idiotic. How's this for one? Say she’s innocent.”

“But we can’t ask someone to adjudicate. I don’t think that we can kill a woman over something like this, but we can’t not do anything, so we need to undertake some suitable form of punishment.”

“Dock a month’s wage?”

“We’re not a corporation!”

“Then what should we do? If it were a guy I’d beat him up until all his teeth have fallen off then leave it at that!”

"We can't do that! Raising a hand against a woman is the worst!"

"I know that! Then, just say she's innocent!"

"But we don't have any reason to… Aah, pardoning her is no good, using violence is no good either…"

"Give her a chance, how's that?"

"Chance?"

"Didn't we give that traitor Jogi a ninety percent chance that time? He ended up dying."

"But, we used Russian roulette that time."

"……"

"That's it! Use Big Bro's poker cards! If she gets a color Joker, then she's guilty."

"Right, right! We'll take out the color Joker from the very start!"

"……"

Hearing this, a troubled expression once again crossed Luck's face and he took a look at the poker cards in Keith's hand.

"What? They're all color Jokers!?"

"I've always wanted to ask- where'd you buy these kinds of cards?"

"You couldn't have bought 52 packs of cards then took out the color Jokers one by one, right……? Big Bro?"

"……"

"Then, then let's do this- if she gets the color Joker then she's innocent!"

"What on earth we're doing?!"

Just what kinds of terrible things were they discussing? Just how were they planning to kill me?

Watching the three men hiding in one corner of the room, Edith's back broke out in cold sweat.

Seeing that the three had been whispering to each other for ages , Tick and the other man finally acted. The mystery man suddenly stopped playing with the five pairs of scissors in his hands and turned to say something quietly to Tick. As Tick '*kachi*'ed the new scissors, he called to the three brothers,

"Hey--- has Edith done something bad?"

Hearing Tick's voice, Luck looked over with a perplexed expression.

"We can't really say it's anything bad- she didn't break the law. Just did something that's bad for us."

"Edith's hair is really long!"

"Eeh, yes, it is……!"

Suddenly, Luck understood. Tick's abnormally innocent eyes were smiling faintly.

"Can I cut it?"

"I already thought this before."

Amidst the sound of snipping scissors, the man playing with the scissors muttered to himself,

"The issue's been resolved, but you guys simply ain't Mafia bosses."

Hair was a woman's life. This was true regardless of the era- though trimming a little was a completely different matter. When Edith understood the simple concept, she immediately lost all strength in her body.

"Let me clarify first- using hair to pardon you was the final resort."

Although the initial suggestion was to shave her clean, 'using scissors are very difficult', so in the end only half her hair was cut.

Tick manipulated the scissors with practiced moves, and her hairstyle seemed to look even better than before.

"I'm dooone~"

Accompanied by the sound of a faint laughter, Tick halted the sound of snipping scissors.

And with this sound, this farce with no audience drew to a close .

"Then, let's return to what we were discussing just now. What kind of information did that man at the information shop want from you? Is it information you can't obtain without coming to people like us?"

This was it. She had merely passed the first test. If these three brothers didn't know anything about 'Vino', then her current determination would be all for nothing.

Praying hard, she slowly said out the name.

"Um, actually, I wanted to find out where the assassin called ' Vino' is!"

The final words just left her mouth when the man challenging twenty pairs of scissors tilted his head back.

"…… Calling me?"

<==>

Just as night was falling, two figures appeared before the Genoard family's villa door. After pressing the doorbell a few times, the magnificent front door opened and an old steward appeared before their eyes.

"Gracious me. I bid you a very good evening, good sirs. May I enquire as to who you are?"

At Benjamin's astonished question, the Chinese- and Irish-looking young men smiled as they said,

"Er, this is Mr. Genoard's household? We came by the recommendation of Chef Gregwall."

"We here to cook."

"Ooh, it's you! Come, come, please come in."

Under the direction of the old steward, they entered the lavishly decorated mansion.

"You must be the steward!"

"Aye, the archetypal steward. But I didn't grow out a beard, sorry about that."

The Chinese-looking chef was Fan Linshan, and the Irish-looking bartender was Jon Panel.

Up till yesterday, they had been working aboard the 'Flying Pussyfoot', but because of some incident, the dining car and train had been damaged. So, with the recommendation of the dining car head chef, Gregwall, they had come here temporarily for work. It would be a one-month probationary contract to start off with, and if they were found to be suitable, they would be taken back to the home in New Jersey as the permanent chef.

For this reason, the two were extremely hopeful about this job. The impressions they made and whether or not they were qualified enough to stay hinged on their ability to come up with delicious, quality dishes given existing ingredients.

As the two thought of various possible situations, they followed behind the old steward, and at last came to the large, grand door of a room on the second floor.

"Miss, miss! The new chef has arrived, would Miss please meet them—"

But, there was no response.

"Miss?"

The old steward didn't know whether he should just open the door: if the mistress was sleeping, then opening the door without permission was absolutely forbidden conduct. Just as the old steward was fretting about what to do, Samasa standing at one side opened the door without asking twice.

"Miz, da chef's 'ere."

Samasa didn't wait and just entered into the room, but Eve was nowhere to be seen. The steward, noticing this, ignored the fact that it was the mistress's room and stepped in too.

"M-, Miss!?"

The old steward exclaimed, but there was no response in the room. The window inside was wide open and the curtains were billowing in the wind. Samasa and the others quickly rushed in, only to see a tall ladder stretching from the second floor straight down to the first.

"What is dis?"

Fan, following them into the room hot on their heels, held a letter in his hand.

"Quick, quickly let me see that!"

The old steward clumsily accepted the letter, his bloodshot eyes skimming through the letter.

The contents inside apologized for leaving the house willfully on her own, and thanked Benjamin and the others for kindly taking care of her all along. Then, when he read to 'If I don't return in three days—', the steward's heart leapt to his throat.

"Miss… It can't be?"

"Aah, Miss… Why do something so foolish?"

Watching the old steward sitting on the sofa, still as stone, Samasa spoke,

"Dun worry, Miz is gonna be fine, fine."

"How can I not worry! Samasa! How can you be so calm—"

The old steward looked up, and his angry words came to an abrupt stop. Samasa had changed into the shoes she normally wore out, as though preparing to go out.

"Where are you going?"

Fan and Jon at her side also looked outside.

"Even if we forgot about the train incident, this year is really turbulent!"

"Cannot be helped ah— cooking with no mistress is waste of effort."

Facing the addled old steward, Samasa said an unbelievable sentence.

"Ah'm gonna find Miz- yu gonna come wit' us or not?"

After a moment's silence, the old steward shouted, like he was scolding his foolish self,

"Of course, of course I'm going. What're we waiting for!"

"But 'scoose me, wossat black suitcase yah be carryin' 'round?"

Samasa asked as she looked at the large black case in Fan's right hand. Fan replied directly,

"This ah— this morning my sister let me keep this. She said I must put it somewhere can trust, and I think this place has a safe, so can put here?"

"Seems like some business wants to issue new drugs or something, so she wanted to put it somewhere reliable."

Hearing this, Samasa patted her chest, saying,

"Oh my, then you should be givin' it t' someone reliable! Here's a reliable and safest place."

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At night, Henry finished work and was preparing to head home when he suddenly saw a shadow standing to one side.

"? Aah, is this not Miss Edith? How can I help you?"

--Hmph, she must be thinking she can't do anything and came back here crying. That must be it.

"Mr. Henry, you said so before, yeah? Information is power. If you wanted to get it, you must pay a reward."

"Yes, that's right. You have this power now?"

"I don't have financial power, but— manpower's the most important."

"Eh?"

In that instant, a hand landed heavily on Henry's shoulder.

"Good evening!"

Henry looked back, only to see a young fellow standing behind him. By young he meant around twenty years old, around the same age as himself.

"*Good, eve, ning*!"

The man repeated again, flashing a look at Henry out of the corner of his eye.

"You said you wanted to see me- how unfriendly."

--It can't be? ---No way!

"Didn't you want to ask me about what happened on the train? "

Pulling Henry along, Claire walked out through the door.

"Then, let's take the next night train. Should I give you a good experience of being killed, or an experience of the feeling of 'power '?"

His will to fight drained as he lost control of his limbs. It felt like he was being engulfed in the roar of a ferocious beast

"The reward will be your terror."

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"This is Eve Genoard's residence; you can leave the rest of the plan to us. First, Edith takes him to hide in the Gandor Family office. We will settle affairs with the Runoratas within a week."

The news agency, after Henry had been taken away. Nicholas was explaining the cause of the various situations to the three Gandor brothers and Edith.

"Mr. Keith, I've already heard about your situation from the Director. After getting a handle on Gustavo and his men's movements, we will inform you, so please wait for my news at your office or at your homes."

There was a serious expression on Nicholas's face, which normally was full of smiles when facing clients.

Elean waited until those people had left before exclaiming happily,

"Thanks for the hard work! Even though you were very busy, but you did very well!"

"Aah, damn it. As an information shop I still prefer to stick to neutral ground as much as possible. I've been viewing this incident rather subjectively, so sorry about that. But this'll be the last time."

"I see. But where's that black case now?"

"Aah, I think we know where it is. Seems like Lia Linshan's younger brother took that black case away. We still haven't received accurate reports as to where it's being taken, but we should have news of it soon."

At the same time, the entrance door of the news agency was pushed open, and in walked a group of people of varying ages, genders and nationalities.

"Elean! I wanna ask yer t' do sumthin'!"

A fat, black woman walked in, holding a large travel bag in her right hand.

Seeing that large, black bag, Elean muttered to himself,

"Now, not being 'subjective' is no longer an option."

"……Spare me."

<==>

"Wait a sec, you said 'Vino'?"

Gustavo roared loudly in the hotel room.

"Yes, that's the current situation, Mr. Gustavo."

"The legendary freelance assassin, that Western idiot?"

"He's not one of the Gandors."

"Now that guy's been fucking hired by the Gandor Family."

Gustavo gave a look of utter disbelief, sucked deeply from his cigarette then press his hand on the ashtray.

"It's already starting to spread among the delinquents on the streets. The news that just came to us said, 'You guys are gonna be finished soon. Once that monster comes, Gustavo definitely won't live more than three days'."

"That's bullshit!"

On the face of it, both his posture and voice were very bold, but in reality his heart had already been quailing with terror from some time.

--'Vino'. That terrifying assassin? Why's he together with that stupid organization? I heard that this guy was hired by Don Bartolo once. The core members of several organizations opposing us in New York were wiped out in just one night by him. In return for his services he received an unimaginable reward- can the Gandor Family really afford that much cash?

"The situation's bad, Mr. Gustavo. A few men have already started quaking."

"Shit, shit, shit! We need to find assassins too! Kill them off before they act!"

"It's too late, our assassins are all directly under Bartolo's control. If he could lend us some he would have lent us some bombs long ago."

"Then find freelance killers or mercenaries! Find some, quick! Guys who won't be scared shitless when they hear the name 'Vino' ! If they kill that guy they can definitely raise their reputation, so someone out there's gotta wanna kill him! Find these kinds of assassins! And while you're at it, raise the reward for the three damn Gandor brothers! Quick! Hurry the fuck up and go!"

"So famous- it's just like the world of those Western flicks. Mr. Gustavo's really lost his head."

As Gustavo's underling grumbled quietly, he unwillingly accepted the order.

In that instant, the 'legend' about 'Vino' finally became real ' information'.

Quietly, surreptitiously— that information seeped into the depths of society.

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--Slipping out of home without anyone noticing is well and all, but how am I supposed to find the Gandor Family?

Although Eve changed into something easy to move in when she came out, the obviously high-class clothing still drew a lot of attention.

Even though the sky was slowly darkening, the area around the Central Bus Station was the same as it was during daytime- filled with all sorts of noise and sounds.

--If not, it might be better if I just went to ask The Informer after all.

"Um, you're Miss Eve Genoard?"

A weak voice came from behind. When she turned back her head and looked, she found it was an abject-looking fellow. Although he was also wearing unconventional clothing, when he stood next to Eve it was just like a comical comparison of contrasts.

A little baffled, Eve gave an almost imperceptible nod of her head.

"Yeah, I'm called Roy. Roy Maddock. Um, I want to ask you something so I called you… Can I?"

"Ask me? What could it be?"

"Um, it's about your family."

Eve's countenance immediately changed.

--Right, this kind of reaction is 'just right'. I only had to grab this girl then everything would be under my control. Use her as a shield to threaten the Runoratas, then Edith and me would be saved! After we're both safe, I can let this girl go!

As Roy affirmed his thoughts, he approached Eve a little forcefully. Because he didn't want his opponent to gain the upper hand, he tried his best to make his tone of voice become scary.

"Actually, I know your family's secret."

With such laughable words, Roy unknowingly triggered the situation to develop in a way he had never dreamt of.

"! Could it be you're part of the Gandor Family?"

"Eh?"

"I'm begging you! Please, please let me meet your boss!"

Overwhelmed by her tough tone of voice, Roy's thoughts became chaotic.

Why? Why did the name Gandor suddenly spring up here? Could it be, could it be I had yet to leave the illusionary world of drugs?

Although he could feel the reality of the situation, Roy could only stand there, blankly.

--Oh no, Edith, Edith, what should I do now--?

<==>

"Impossible! How, how could Grandfather and Father do such things! It's impossible…!"

"Please, please, calm down."

Seeing Eve dazed, Roy desperately tried to comfort her with a pained expression.

He had taken her to a nearby restaurant and explained himself. It seemed that this young lady didn't know anything about her own family, so he could only tell her everything about her own family in one go. If she didn't know, then he had to secure this girl after this and go trick the Runorata Family.

Watching the girl with trembling shoulders and a tear-streaked face, Roy finally sensed that he was one shameless, despicable bastard. Telling her the truth that he originally didn't want to say to her, letting this girl who was different from him, someone who had a future and hopes, fall into such a state. Was there really no other way? Was there really no way to trick fate at the very end and let everyone wave their goodbyes with happiness and joy?

There was no such way whatsoever in Roy's brain at that moment.

--Drugs. I must've taken too much. My brain must've really melted from all the pleasures of the sensation of my brain melting. In the past, some strange liquid flowed out of my ears. That should be my brain. Damn, damn, damn, I, I was really a big fool, could I really escape together with Edith? Could I really give her happiness afterwards? Damn , damn, damn, Edith should have scolded me for being a fool several hundred times over. Because I really was a fool.

As Roy became caught up in the whirlpool of his own making, he desperately consoled Eve.

But there was one thing he kept to himself.

That was: her father and older brother had been murdered by the Runorata Family. He had first described the relationship Eve's family had set with the Runorata Family and originally planned to give her 'hatred for the Runoratas' so she wouldn't cooperate with them, but now that he thought about it, it was truly fortunate that he hadn't spoken about it. If he told her about this, she may very well cooperate with him.

--But if I did that that'd be too evil. If I really did do that I'd be a villainous junkie. While I'm still rational, I must absolutely not tell her about that. If I said it, I'd really be a junkie, no different from a demon.

After more than one hour, Eve finally subsided and regained her tranquil state of mind. Calmly, anxiously, she said to Roy,

"I apologize for panicking just now."

"Huh? Ah, aah. Sorry. If possible, please forget what I just said. Ah, but, no, since I'm gonna end up dead anyway. What to do."

Although he was very nervous and shocked just now, Roy had already regained his reason.

"May I ask you a question?"

"What is it?"

"A while ago, my father and elder brother passed away due to a car accident. But, this incident, could it be—"

"No! No, I think. That information shop guy said to be, that was 'just an accident'!"

"Is that so……"

A kind of relieved expression surfaced on the girl's face, and, seeing this, he hated himself even more.

I can't, I can't sacrifice this child's future any more than I have.

Then, using her name to threaten the Runorata Family was another way of robbing her of her future. If he was not careful, this girl would be killed even if he did everything perfectly, right? In that case, the Runorata Family wouldn't be damaged in the slightest, but that would put his friends and family into--

--Eh?

He finally realized that this battle was one that couldn't be won from the very beginning.

--That bastard at the information shop……

A surge of anger gushed up. By coincidence, Eve called Roy at the same time.

"I know."

"Huuh?"

"I have a request."

After hearing the details of the request, everything immediately went dark before Roy's eyes. But he understand that, right here, right now, he had no way of refusing.

"Please take me to the Gandor Family right away."

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"See, this is the Gandor Family office."

In an alleyway a little distance from Mulberry Street, Eve and Roy stood before the notice reading 'Business temporarily

suspended due to renovations'. This was the jazz bar Edith had taken him to many times. The Gandor office should be in the basement.

"I can't show my face around here- go in by yourself. I'll wait here for you."

"I understand, and um, thank you!"

"Don't, don't, please, don't say stuff like 'thank you' to me."

Roy hastily shook his head with a sorrowful expression.

At this moment.

Ka-click

The door with the notice stuck on it suddenly opened, and the sound of metal on metal rang out in the alleyway.

Roy was so shocked his heart almost stopped, then, slowly, slowly, he turned his head towards the door.

"Oh my. Do you have some business? I'm really sorry, my apologies, but other than Mr. Tick there's no one else here."

Standing in the doorway was a beautiful young lady who was close to her thirties. With her willowy build, short, gold hair and delicate skin, she was just like a doll- it was as though she could be easily broken with a forceful hug.

"Um, um, we, we'd like to see one of the Gandors, um…"

"There are three people here called Gandor. Including my sister and I, that's a total of five."

Hearing this elegant answer, Roy and Eve asked without suspecting anything,

"Um, you are?"

The woman answered this question serenely.

"My name is Kate. I'm the eldest of the brothers'… Keith Gandor's wife."

Keith and the others returned to the office, where there was just one person, Tick, playing with his scissors.

"Ah— You're back---"

"Just now Mrs. Kate came by. I said you had left so she went back."

Hearing Tick's words, Keith frowned a little.

"Aah, I had said I was going back home for a bit today."

"Been working all through the end of last year and the beginning of this one, so I never went home."

"……"

As Keith shook his head, he hung his coat and hat on the wall. No matter what he couldn't return home tonight either.

"Never mind, now's not the time to go back."

"That guy, Claire, he's really slow. He couldn't really have taken that guy for a ride on the night train, right?"

"If it's Claire it's very possible."

"Geez, that guy, he's always so strange. And he even said something like 'I have something I want to ask the The Informer too."

Claire, who normally looked aloof, was now smiling everyday, as though he were thinking of something to be happy about.

"Aah, that's it, he wants to ask about the person he wants to marry, right?"

"Then, do you still have any other questions?"

Squatting on the roof of the night train, Claire asked Henry, who was lying flat on his back. Henry's face was stark white, his half-open eyes just like that of a dead fish.

"If there's nothing, then it's my turn to ask. You seem to have provided information to a woman called Edith, so tell me some equivalent information, how's that?"

Henry, completely wrung dry, nodded non-stop at Claire.

"You still haven't lost consciousness yet- that's really something . Looks like you're got very high endurance huh. Then, I'm gonna ask. First, it's about a woman. And also, one more thing---"

On the express train, he happily asked everything he wanted to know, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Is what you're saying true?"

Late at night on New Year's Day, in a hotel room, Gustavo questioned his underling.

"There's absolutely no mistake. That guy, Roy, contacted Eve Genoard, then took her to the Gandor headquarters. Just as we were about to capture them, a woman suddenly came out of the office, then she drove them away. We've sent a few people to tail them- seems like they've reached a house outside of their territory. "

"You sacks of shit! Why the hell didn't you immediately kill him the moment he stepped on Gandor ground?"

"Our most humble apologies, sir. We thought it'd be okay to check out where he was headed."

"Ha! Then how did he even escape in someone else's car!? You didn't kill him for such a damn stupid reason?"

"A-, also, Mr. Begg told us to capture him alive."

Once he heard Begg's name, Gustavo's face immediately flushed red.

"It doesn't matter what the hell that formalin-covered guy says! Ah? Who's your boss? Say it! Tell me now!"

"Of course it's Mr. Bartolo Runorata."

"Huh!?"

Gustavo instantly swallowed the retort he was about to throw back at his underlings. He initially thought that the name coming from their mouths would be his own, but he never thought it'd be Bartolo's name. And there were quite a few other executives in the room, so if he lost his temper here it would represent his betrayal of his boss.

"……That's right. I was appointed by that Mr. Bartolo Runorata to be in charge of this piece of land. So my orders are absolute!"

He had done a good job of defusing the awkward situation just now. Was he the only one who thought so? Everyone else felt that he was just glossing over his mistake.

"Is, that, so?"

Begg, who had come in at some unknown point in time, just hmphed twice through his nose at Gustavo's shout.

"You…"

"Mr. Bal, toro, has given, me full, con, trol, and, response, bility, over, the matter, of, drugs. In, other, words, my orders, a, bout, drugs, are also, absolute."

Begg, restraining himself from smiling, openly challenged Gustavo a sharp look.

"One day I'll annihilate that thinking of yours."

There was intense hatred and intent to kill in Gustavo's eyes.

"But, I've, never once, thought, that way. Then, I'll, leave, the, live cap, ture to, you."

It appeared Begg didn't have anything to say after that, so he turned around and left the room.

"Oh y-, y-, yes, a, forma, lin-, co, vered guy, isn't, half, bad. At least, he, won't rot- that's for, sure."

On the western side of Manhattan, inside a house. This was the eldest of the Gandor Family's- Keith's- home. Until last year, the three brothers had always lived in a nearby apartment, but ever since the second eldest, Berga, married, they moved out to live on their own. Now only the youngest, Luck, still stayed in the old apartment.

"All right then, don't waste time and start eating. Originally I wanted to have dinner with my husband, but that person's always very busy."

"Um, uh, guess I'll help myself."

Roy, who hadn't eaten anything for the past few days, ravenously wolfed down the New Year feast.

Australian steak, Japanese sashimi, Italian spaghetti, and the list went on; there was every kind of delicacy from different countries, so even Eve, still rather polite in the beginning, picked up fork and knife.

"…Delicious."

Eve too, who had been silent all along, couldn't help but praise it. It was a very simple, truthful sentiment, but for her, her feelings about this still remained complex.

The woman before them called Kate didn't look the slightest bit like a Mafia boss's wife, but she herself felt that there was nothing she could do about it. What if, no, she definitely was- she was the wife of the person who killed her older brother, Dallas. Eve didn't know what to do while sitting in front of such a person.

"Wonderful! I was worried it didn't suit your tastes!"

Although Kate's faintly smiling expression was very gentle, there was a nagging feeling that it was a little thin, like she was a woman made of mist.

"Then continuing from what we were saying—"

To ease her complicated feelings, she took the initiative to get straight to the point. They had heard a lot about Keith and the others just now, but from the looks of things Keith had initially planned to come home tonight to celebrate New Year with Kate. However, it appeared that there was something urgent today, so he didn't come back.

"Um, do you know when I can meet him?"

"Hmm this- he's the kind of person who has to deal with unexpected events everyday… If the disputes have been settled, I think he'd come back everyday."

"Disputes?"

"I'm not very certain about the details myself. That person never talks about business at home… So I think he won't be coming back early tonight."

Kate spoke about her absent husband with loneliness and happiness.

"Um… He is Mafia, right?"

Pupiruu! Hearing Eve's words, Roy sprayed out some of his red tea.

"M-Miss Eve. That's a little too direct."

"Eh, but…"

Watching the two, Kate just quietly gave a faint smile.

"That's right, though on the surface he is the manager of the jazz bar."

Perhaps because she could sense what they were thinking, Kate started talking a little about her husband's work.

"This organization was originally created by their father. At first, the boss of the original organization their father was part of suddenly said he wanted to give away part of the territory to one of the executives. Although it was very strange, that executive- their father- accepted it with delighted. And after that, they became embroiled in a very large dispute and the territory shrank immediately. It just so happened that the territory was hemmed in on all sides by territories of other large Mafias, so it became the boundary line. The former boss learnt of this, but he couldn't just run away if he wanted to preserve his dignity, so he passed it over to their clueless father. He's been on the run ever since with the money he's earned— that's how the story goes."

When Roy and Eve had finished eating, Kate cleared up the table as she narrated, as though speaking aloud her own thoughts.

"But then there wouldn't be much territory left for the organization, would there? Keith's father was a very hardy man from long ago, and he always said 'this organization I've accepted from boss must not disappear', so in the end he passed away at an early age due to overworking. Inheriting their father's will, Keith

and his brothers have always been protecting this piece of land. So there've been disputes happening almost every day, and even I was almost killed twice."

"Why, why then do you still live with such a dangerous person?"

Although she knew it was an impolite question, Eve had to ask. Furthermore, if it was Kate, she may very well answer this question.

After finally washing up all the dishes, she sat in front of an organ in the corner of the room.

The two turned their gazes to Kate, then, her slender fingers glided over the keyboard.

The music from the organ seemed to reflect the feelings of Roy and Eve at that moment in time.

In the beginning, there was a passage of the melody filled with unease and suspicion, then as they listened on, it gradually chimed in with the two's feelings, and the tune slowly changed. Although the performance was just five minutes long, it had beautifully wiped away Roy and Eve's fears and anxieties, tying them together with the melody, giving one the wondrous feeling of harmony. As the performance came to an end, the two applauded and praised the music.

"Great, no, it's absolutely amazing!"

"You didn't look at the score at all… Is it be an impromptu performance?"

Kate gave a light nod of the head at Eve's question.

It was the year 1927, when silent movies were the only products on the world movie market.

Movie theatres hired organists to accompany the wide variety of silent tragedy-comedy movies, who would play impromptu melodies, sometimes according to the venue, sometimes according to the movie. This was the main trend at that time.

Back then, Kate was hired by the largest movie theatre at the time as the organist, and played all sorts of impromptu tunes. Sometimes it was according to the number of customers, sometimes according to the weather- always playing songs that best suited the occasion.

But one year. The era of silent movies finally came to an end.

The powerful and influential movie theatres produced what became known as vitaphones- in other words, 'talkies'. With the rise of talkies, beginning with the birth of the movie 'Don Juan' a year ago, movies gradually became more functional and the revolution of the world of movies began.

That year, the first feature-length movie ever to have sound, ' The Jazz Singer', became the talk of town, and it was decided that it would be screened at the movie theatre which was hiring Kate. In an instant, long queues of people turned up at the door a few days before screening, and thus created a sensation.

Among the swarming throngs of crowds was Kate.

She wasn't interested in the talkie or the main actor Al Jolson. Because if these kinds of talkies became popular, she would become unemployed. Kate felt that recorded music paled in comparison to pure music. Performers like herself definitely wouldn't lose. To ease her anxieties, she decided to enter the movie theatre with a sardonic smile on her face. She sat on a seat, waiting calmly for the movie to begin.

The organ that was supposed to be used for performance was covered up with a piece of black cloth. Just what kind of songs were they? What kind of music? She would definitely not lose against it. Absolutely not.

If spectacular music could flow from this movie, she would understand.

Then, the movie began.

Even though graphics appeared when the movie started, there was not a single note of music to be heard.

Was it broken? Just as Kate hostilely prepared herself to listen, the first sound rang out in the theatre.

That was from the audience at the screening—the tremendous, thunderous sound of applause.

By the time she noticed it, Kate's face was already wet with tears.

---*I've lost*.

That was sound she would never have dreamed of. Or perhaps she was exaggerating. But Kate knew extremely well. That this was sound she could never perform. She could feel that she, whom she thought could triumph with song and music, who had intended to laugh sardonically, had become such an insignificant existence. She could sense that her own way of thinking was an enormous insult to other performers.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute—"

When tears trickled down from the corners of her eyes, the first dialogue was spoken.

These words, that would later become the world's greatest and most famous line, struck a chord with her heart.

"You ain't heard nothin' yet! "

She didn't really remember what happened after that. There was a lot of dialogue afterwards, and the ending was also presented in subtitled format, but to Kate, this was unimportant- the audience listened to Jolson's songs with touched expressions.

Then, movie theatres around the country successively adopted talkies, silent movies quickly fell out of favor and talkies finally took the stage.

She too, without exception, went down the path of unemployment and changed between many kinds of jobs. Then, one day, a strange man appeared before her. It was a man of few words, a man who, no matter how one looked at him, didn't seem like he did a proper line of business. Kate simply didn't know what he wanted to say to begin with, but finally he opened his mouth quietly and spoke.

"At which movie theatre can I hear your accompaniment? You can't see the accompanists' faces at movies nowadays, so I don't even know who's who."

She thought he was kidding at first, but this peculiar man seemed to always come to the theatre to listen to her accompaniment.

After saying this, the man didn't have anything more to say, shut his mouth and didn't talk anymore. In the end, she learned that this man was the boss of the Gandor Family, and she gradually gained an interest in his life.

As Kate gradually understood this man called Keith, she started wanting to perform for him.

Because he was just like a silent movie.

When Kate spoke about Keith, her voice became much more relaxed. In contrast, she almost didn't seem to want to talk about herself.

So, to address Eve's queries, this performance became even more exquisite.

A young lady who said 'I wish to meet the Gandor Family boss' , a young man who said 'I don't want to, or can't, meet him'.

From Kate's point of view, these two people had exceptional circumstances. Eve possessed some kind of anxiety and anticipation. As for Roy, he seemed scared and at the same time needing to do something- these kinds of complicated feelings.

But she could be sure about this: these two weren't bad people. To her, just this was enough and nothing else was necessary.

"You two, do you still want to go back tonight?"

Hearing such a question, the two exchanged looks. To Roy, who never imagined that Edith was searching for him at this very moment, a place he could go back to simply never existed. To Eve, if she went back now then she wouldn't be able to come out like today.

Seeing their expressions, Kate smiled faintly.

"Then you can stay here. Let's go back to the office to have a look tomorrow afternoon."

The newspaper agency, late at night.

Sitting on the chief editor's seat, Nicholas smoked heavily while silently staring up at the sky.

---I've lost count of how many years I've been doing this job.

Nicholas, who originally worked for the military intelligence unit, came here after resigning. He used every ounce of his strength to get to where he was today. Here, he taught those Asians how to use guns, and enabled The Informer to gain power to contend with the surrounding organizations.

--It's not enough. This is nowhere close to enough.

Given that he was working at The Informer, he couldn't completely eliminate his anxieties of attacks, even if he armed himself with more equipment. This was part and parcel of working at an information agency.

Manipulating information while being controlled by information at the same time. The experience from working at military intelligence was already telling Nicholas that this was an unpleasant fact of life.

--Information is power. But this power isn't something anyone can monopolize. It's like weather- even if one can forecast it, one can't fully control it. I really wish Henry would learn to appreciate this…

Just as he thought that, the door to the editorial department was gently pushed open.

"Henry!"

Appearing at the door was a young man, who was ghastly pale from head to toe.

"Hey, get a grip. Are you still alive?"

Nicholas quickly caught Henry, who was about to collapse on the ground. Wide-eyed and shaking throughout his entire body, as though something was going to explode deep within his bones. His eyes weren't focused, although the faint sound of his breathing brushed past Nicholas's ear.

"Son of a bitch… Vino, you bastard, you've gone too far."

While Nicholas cursed the person who was not present, he checked to make sure Henry's life wasn't in danger.

"So you've finally learned today what's called fear- this is a little punishment."

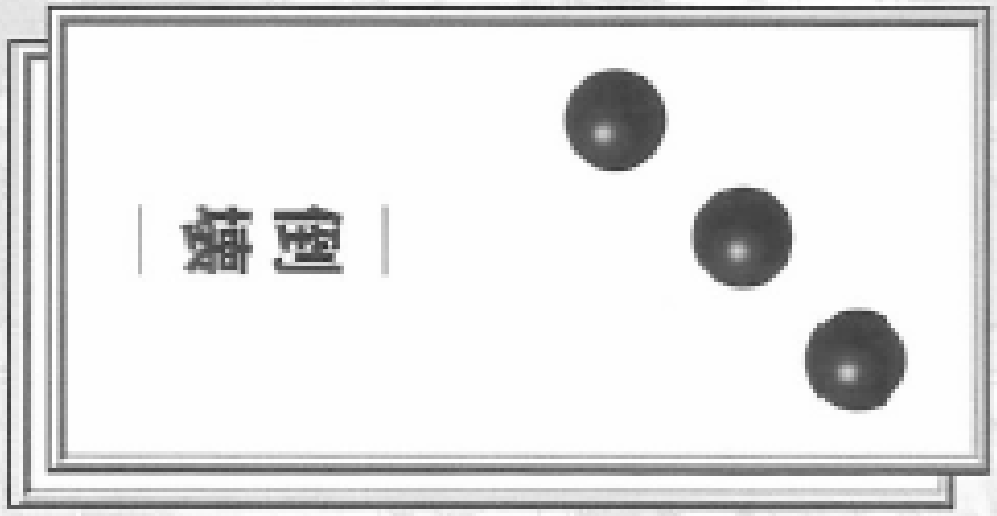
As he listened to Nicholas's voice, Henry's consciousness quickly slipped away. Just as he was about to pass out, his lips cracked open and started mumbling softly. Were his wits muddled ?

"Already got it… this information… this power… it's mine…"

Nicholas watched Henry's face quietly, commenting to himself,

"Damn it, this is why you just don't deal in this kind of business at an information agency!"

Collapse


蘑菇

2 January 1932 Noon The underground bar, the 'Alveare'

The bar operated by the Martillo Family.

During daytime this was also the place where members of the organizations had their meals. Today, many members of the organization, high-ranked and low, were gathered here.

Firo, the manager in charge of the underground casino, had originally come to the shop for something to eat. But when he opened the door and walked in, he noticed something different from usual. The large, round table that should be at the centre had been moved to one side, leaving behind a very large space in the middle.

"…What're you doing?"

There, a couple in evening dress were diligently placing down some things.

"Shhh! Quiet, quiet! We're about to knock it down!"

"Gonna knock it down!"

"?"

Lined up on the floor were thin, rectangular objects, and like mahjong tiles were marked with patterns not unlike numbers on dies. He finally understood, remembering that this was bought a few days ago at the 'general shop', and were towed back using Ennis's car.

"What, aren't these dominos? What're you thinking of doing, putting these things on the floor?"

In contrast to the dumbfounded Firo, the couple, Isaac and Miria, continued carefully putting down the dominos. These two people were Firo's friend, and had only come here a few days ago.

"To knock it down?"

"To knock it down!"

"Huh?"

Firo totally didn't comprehend.

"If you're going to knock it down, why spend so much effort putting them in place? Is there any meaning to it?"

"That's a really tricky question. If we had to say it, it'd be because they're dominos!"

"Domineers, right?! Dominists, right?!"

"Don't talk like you're some mountaineer.* Just what on earth are they up to?"

- Thanks to e_dimension/Janice for clearing up the meaning! To quote her:

  "Firo means exactly what he means here, as ancients who lived in the mountains sometimes referred to themselves as "

dominer/dominists of the world's height" or simply "one who's able to conquer it all". Very obscure reference to old historical writings that prob'ly doesn't make any sense to most D:"

At Firo's question, the bespectacled man sitting at the bar counter answered,

"It's a very popular game among the children. The children, who don't generally know the rules of dominos, all play it like this !"

"I see…… Speaking of which, you guys are blocking the way."

Firo, who only wanted to have a little something before leaving, didn't think this was fun at all. But all the surrounding seats in the bar were full, so he had no choice but to walk further in. But--

"What the? There are even dominos placed inside."

More people were gathered inside the bar.

"Mr. Pezzo and Mr. Randy, why're you here too?"

"Oh! We're waiting t' see the last instant when it all falls! It's very interesting."

"I played it a lot when I was kid too!"

Behind the two seniors*, two girls were currently lining up dominos very seriously.

- seniors as in higher ranking than him rather than elderly…

"Even Lia and Ennis are playing!"

"Veli interesting! Dis."

"Yes! Firo, why not play together?"

Many dominos were already placed inside, forming a geometric shape.

"I just wanted to have a little something to eat!"

"Firo, you're blocking the way!"

"If you're not going to help, then get out of the way!"

Looking to one side, he saw that two seniors who were higher ranked than him had also joined in the game.

"Mr. Ronnie and Mr. Yagulma…"

"Ah, when I was young, I used to play this kind of game with chess. It raises your powers of concentration- you should try too!"

"No way I'm playing! If people from other organizations see is, we're going to be the laughing stock!"

Firo watched, stunned, as he waved his hands in refusal. While rapidly setting down dominos, Ronnie remarked,

"That's not a problem! At that time I'll dispose of all those people!"

"Please don't say such terrifying things so seriously!"

He didn't know whether to approve of this or to feel happy at this kind of peaceful scene. Firo's head started hurting and he just waited by the bar for a seat to be vacated.

"But come to think of it, who designed this impressive pattern? It can't be Isaac and Miria, can it?"

Suddenly, everyone in the shop cast their eyes at one man.

"……I like these kinds of things."

"Mr. Maizaaa!"

<==>

At the same time.

"You're absolutely sure!"

Hearing his men's report, Gustavo verified expressionlessly.

"Yes! There's absolutely no mistaking it: it was the case from earlier on. I saw it very clearly- even the location of the marking was the same."

"Really?"

Gustavo sat back in his chair, drawing in a deep breath.

Last night, after discovering Roy's movements, he had sent one of his men to investigate the house Roy was watching as a precaution, but ended up discovering an Asian and a Caucasian entering that villa, that black bag in hand. For further confirmation , they continued monitoring that place.

Then they saw a fat, black woman and the two people from just now walking out, that case in the woman's right hand. What was stranger was the place those folk headed to.

Their destination was--- the The Informer, DD Newspaper Agency. After they went in, they never saw them come out.

"Just what the hell's going on?"

The placed Roy was watching was actually the villa of Eve Genoard's family. Furthermore, he had come into contact with Eve from the Genoard family. Since it was not by coincidence, they had to continue monitering the situation.

Roy had targeted this daughter of the Genoard family. In that case, that girl should already know the Genoard family's ' underground business', and would use this to negotiate with us.

But Roy shouldn't know about the Genoard family! He was just a druggie hooligan- how could he know something like this.

The original matter should have ended here at this point, but when he thought about everything that happened afterwards he found everything was linked.

That black woman from the Genoard family taking that black case to the information shop. After meeting up, Eve and Roy headed to the Gandor Family's underground office.

--What, this isn't so simple anymore. This definitely isn't a simple matter.

Gustavo picked up the ashtray again and snapped it with his bare hands. Then, holding the broken ashtray, he said calmly,

"Gandor, information shop, Roy, Genoard."

He, a savage who lusted for fights, returned to top form and slowly stood up from his chair.

"**These people, could they be in together on this?**"

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"Then, have you found them? Those 'freelance killers'."

"Y-, yes, they're all waiting in a room."

Hearing Gustavo's question, the lone underling answered nervously. It was obvious the Gustavo today was completely different yesterday- he had already regained his usual bearing, as though if someone dared to look down on him they'd be instantly beheaded.

"In the same room? Can they be of any use when they've seen each other's faces?"

"That's one thing I can be sure of. They don't talk among themselves, and our men are also ready."

"Really?"

Without any special feelings, Gustavo opened the door to that room.

"Hello! You must be the boss, right? *Amigo**."

- amigo: Spanish for 'friend'

"……"

As the room door opened, a sunny voice of a young girl came through.

At the side of the table at the centre of the room, a dark-skinned girl was smiling faintly. She still wore an innocent smile; she should be younger than twenty. This woman wore the traditional Mexican costume; she should be a Mexican. Tucked at her waist were two katanas*, which she had somehow brought into the hotel .

- Katana: single-bladed, Japanese sword.

Beside the woman was a man slumped in a chair, holding a whiskey bottle. He didn't even need to use a glass and just drunk directly from the bottom, a brilliant contrast with that girl. He had no expression on his face, and had to be upward of fifty-years of age.

"……"

Standing opposite the old man was a young man with his arms folded. An unusual long coat was draped around him and he wore a very wide-brimmed hat, revealing a pair of very sharp eyes.

Then there were no more new faces to be seen; they were all his own underlings.

Gustavo grabbed the throat of one underling at the side, and lifted him to the wall with just one hand. That poor underling's feel dangled off the ground, thrashing and unable to speak.

"What I wanted you to find were 'assassins', not to scout street performers from Central Park. If you've got anything to say, you better explain yourself."

"Mffffaaa, eh, t-t-there's, n-n-n-no way, there'd be so many ff-f-free-fo-for-hire assassins at a time like this!"

"I don't want to hear excuses."

"..Nn.. aaaaaah……"

At that moment, the girl sitting by the table acted. In the blink of the eye, the girl disappeared.

In the instant it took for Gustavo to turn his head, there was a flash of silver light under the table and that Mexican girl had already emerged from the underneath, drawing that long sword and pressing it against his throat- Gustavo didn't even have time to prepare himself.

"Stop quarreling, *amigo*. Once you see our strength you won't chatter so much, *amigo*!"

"Do you have a habit of pointing your blades at your '[i]amigos[/i]'?"

Muttered Gustavo sarcastically and coolly as he flung the underling forcefully onto the floor.

"This isn't the same, *amigo*. I just acted when I felt my partner, Murasamia, move by itself. My pal's real bad at keeping quiet."

'Muarasamia' was probably the name of the sword. The girl drew back her sword and slowly sheathed it.

"…You've massive problems as a person, but seems like it's not all talk and no show."

"Are you praising me? Thanks, *amigo*!"

"I'm not the slightest interested in being friends with you, so don't you me '*amigo*' again."

None of the others even so much blinked at the girl's inhuman actions.

"Hmph, can't you guys show a little more spine?"

"W-wait, there's still one more coming."

The underling, who had been coughing non-stop, finally regained his voice and reported to Gustavo that one person hadn't come yet.

"Who? I'm not interested in small fry."

Just as that underling was about to tell him the name, the room door opened and a man appeared in the doorway, wearing what looked to be glasses with a very strong prescription. Although his face looked youthful, he kept a beard, making his age unguessable. This man didn't care about the strange atmosphere in the room and said tonelessly,

"I'm very honoured that you've gone to such lengths to call me. "

That man looked at Gustavo's underling and dipped his head.

"But due to a prior contract, I can't accept your request for killing."

No one in the room understood the sudden words coming from this man.

"Pl-, please wait a moment! Mr. Felix!"

Felix. When this name was heard, the mood in the room immediately changed. The assassins' eyes bulged, Gustavo's men became a little disorderly and the man who had been drinking all along capped the bottle. Gustavo too frowned a little, standing there and not moving a muscle.

Felix? Equally famous as 'Vino', the Felix nicknamed ' Freelancer'? I had heard he was living somewhere in Manhattan, but did he really manage to find this person?

"I'm up for anything once the previous job's over, but I don't accept duplicate requests. I'll take on as many jobs as you want other than that. Anything goes, from moving house to kidnapping. "

With that, he turned to leave. Watching his back, Gustavo felt this person commanded a very imposing aura.

"Wait a moment. You, don't you want test your strength against 'Vino'? If you can kill him, then it'll be clear for all just which of you are stronger!"

"That's pointless. I'm not some kid who gets all worked up about being 'the best'. A title like that's nothing worth getting excited about."

"So that's to say, you don't want to fight it out with him?"

"Outside of work, I only kill the fellows who want to kill me. Is that all?"

It was futile pressing the issue. Musing over what he just said, Gustavo suddenly thought of something.

"Wait, didn't you say you'd also do kidnapping? Then, there shouldn't be a problem if I hired you **right now**?"

The man turned this over his mind for a while, then turned around and said,

"I don't mind."

“You can name your price. Your task is to 'haul over two people here from Hell's Kitchen - one man, one woman- without letting the other territories catch wind of it'. Because it’s other organization’s territory, we can’t act directly.”

This man nicknamed ‘Freelancer’ simply didn’t question about he details, and said outright,

“Then why don't we discuss the price.”

After the ‘Freelancer’ left, Gustavo started relegating tasks to these people

“Hm, we now have twenty people. None of you **professional** killers move first- wait until ‘Vino’ appears before acting. Since he hasn’t appeared at the locations we’ve attacked, we only have to seize those Gandor Family folk to find out where he’s hiding. If he escapes, you can add another note to your resume, saying ‘Vino’ ran away when he saw you. In other words, I don't give a rat's ass if he gets away. I’ll pay you the reward after it’s all over, since it's always possible someone might backstab us.”

From the sarcasm used when referring to the 'professionals', it was clear Gustavo didn’t fully trust them.

Then, he issued orders to his own underlings.

“We’ve always been taken for fools by others. But this will end.”

Gustavo placed his personal shotgun into an instrument case and slammed his hands on the table.

"We'll take care of those guys today. Let those who exclusively write articles for the Gandor Family, the shitty reporters of the DD Newspaper Agency, draw the curtains on opening act to this bloodbath! Pump their blood into the DD's printing press, and dye tomorrow's papers with news in the most brilliant shade of red! Leave no one alive!"

Standing there before the crowd awaiting orders was a man.

"Where? Where, are you, plan, ning, to go?"

Confronting Begg, who was looking at him with astonishment, Gustavo just smiled as he said viciously,

"Let's see you stop this!"

Seeing Begg frown slightly, he felt for the first time that he was above this man. But to the Gustavo of now, that was no longer significant!

<==>

"Yes, understood! ……Yes. Good, we'll act immediately too."

In the basement under the jazz bar, Luck was listening to someone on the phone.

"? A girl around 15 years old? No, she never came by!"

After Luck hung up, he turned to Keith and Berga with a troubled expression.

"A day earlier than expected- our friends at DD Newspaper Agency are about to be attacked."

"Ha! Isn't that great? Those guys' lives are cut short by another day."

"……"

"Let's go! Let's go, quick! If all goes well it should all end by tomorrow!"

A smile immediately appeared on Luck's somewhat weary face, and he gave a soft laugh of excitement.

"Yeah, we'll put aside the matter about drugs for now. It's reckoning time for the race course, casino, bar, and my assassination- let's give them a good taste our power!"

The three brothers stowed guns and knives in their breastpockets and pulled on their coats. Finally, Luck picked up the phone again, called some unknown place and just said 'the health check starts at two' before hanging up.

"Mr. Tick, you're in charge of guarding this place! If Claire comes back, tell him 'the party at DD Newspaper Agency has already started'."

"Yes! I understand! Please take care too!"

After clasping hands with the somewhat worried Tick, the three headed up from the office.

"But where on earth could that Claire be?"

"Can't be helped! Even if we told Claire it was tomorrow and told him to play a waiting game, this guy won't wait."

"……"

"Never mind! If he doesn't come… Then we'll just have to work as one!"

<==>

--There was a slight feeling of anxiety.

In Keith's home, after Eve had helped clear up lunch, she sat beside Roy.

"What should we do next?"

Hearing Roy's question, Eve shook an 'I-don't-know' with her head.

"I've been thinking all night- there isn't much point in you staying here, so go back first! No, even if you said I brought you here, you can see Kate anytime, so it's still better to go back first!"

--Perhaps you were right- when I saw Kate, I felt that Mr. Keith wasn't as bad as we thought. Perhaps the information shop people had made a mistake. If that were the case, Brother Dallas was probably alive. In that case, I shouldn't add to your troubles, and maybe I should return to Benjamin and Samasa.

"Just say you were taken away by me- since I'm escaping anyway, it doesn't matter if we add a kidnapping to the list of crimes!"

"That's not it!"

--Ah, don't talk anymore, hurry up and go back! Hurry back to Benjamin, then see Mrs. Kate afterwards and let her take you to Keith.

--Then, find your brother, Dallas, and have a family union!

Having also settled on doing this, Eve stood up in preparation of telling this to Kate. But at this moment, the front door suddenly opened and in came someone neither of them knew.

"Um, it's Miss Eve and Mr. Roy, right?"

The man slowly walked over to the two dazed people.

"Please come with me."

"Eh, hey, who're you? Mrs. Kate… what'd you do to Mrs. Kate?!"

Ignoring his question, that person closed the gap between them in an instant and gave a quick jab at his solar plexus.

"Sorry, I'm in a bit of a hurry."

"Gah…"

"Mr. Roy!"

Eve flusteredly ran to Roy's side, and that man--- 'Freelancer' said with a bland smile,

"You rushed over without even thinking of running. What a good girl!"

As he remarked on her behaviour, the man slung the unconscious Roy over his shoulder.

"You can think of yourselves as kidnapees. Don't worry, I didn't do anything to Mrs. Kate. She's just out buying something."

The man helped Eve stand up, piggybacked Roy and walked out of the house openly and unashamed.

"Our destination is the Daily Days Newspaper Agency- we best hurry."

<==>

The DD Newspaper Agency, the place where all the powers were coming to fight the decisive death match.

There was not a single bit of the usual noise to be heard in the editorial department today; everyone worked silently.

In the Director's Suite, high-level members of the agency were all gathered here, as well as the Benjamin and the others who were planning to spend the night at the agency, Edith who had just returned from her search for Eve and the director, who had been browsing through documents all along. The main and supporting characters of this incident and related people were all together.

After learning of the entire situation, Benjamin rushed forward and started beating up Henry; Jon and Fan immediately came over and pulled him away. At that moment, Samasa went to continue punching and kicking Henry.

After this little episode, someone came to report some troublesome news.

"Our insider reports that, today at two, that is, an hour from now, Gustavo will be attacking us."

Facing the director, who was in a little bit of a quandary, Nicholas said happily,

“And our response?”

“Those kinds of things, we'll leave it to the Gandors this time.”

Hearing such a response from the director, Nicholas showed obvious disappointment.

“This was Keith’s request. Normally, we'd destroy them with our own hands to protect our position as the neutral party, but this time, we , The Informer, have also been pulled in as part of the incident.”

To suppress Nicholas’s discontent, the director raised his voice this time,

“As one of the involved, we have no way of viewing such an incident objectively. Which is why we have to carefully consider our course of action. Then again, this is just my personal opinion, but-----”

After a moment's silence, the director articulated his own views clearly and frankly.

“—'I want to wipe Gustavo's offensive mug from this city.' --- What does everyone think about this?”

There was not a single protest; only Benjamin gave an uncharacteristic cheer.

"Just like the incident caused by the wine of immortality a year ago, the ones who have become the fuse are us, which is also this place. The conditions have already been prepared, no, it's precisely because we've made these preparations that Gustavo and his cohorts dare to come here! All the information has already collected, and what's next is to wait for the instant when the overlapping information to crumble and dissolve. Before this moment comes, let us do what we can!"

Finishing his passionate speech, the director picked up the phone to give a call to the Gandor Family office.

"Then, I hope that everyone would hide in the sewers in the intervening period. This sewer under us leads straight to the police station- if anything happens, escape from there."

Before speaking to Luck over the phone, the director assigned Nicholas and Elean their duties.

"Please tell everyone to take the information and go into hiding. The Daily Days has never skipped an issue, and tomorrow's circulation needs to be the same as usual."

<==>

"We're done!"

"We're finally done!"

Just past noon, in the Alveare, people had finally constructed a geometric shape.

After Isaac placed the last domino in place, everyone in the store applauded and cheered.

"Shh! Wait"

"Everyone wait!"

The two placed their hands by their mouths, and everyone stopped cheering.

"The most exciting moment…"

"…Is about to begin…"

The room became absolutely silent, and Isaac and Miria carefully clasped their hands together and---

Lightly, slowly, pushed down the first domino.

<==>

At Gustavo's forceful kick, the double doors swayed ponderously before falling over.

The hinges of the door sprang out, and the fortified glass shattered and rained down on the floor with a deafening sound.

If they immediately used guns, the cops would come over very quickly. First, send in a few people to suppress the receptionist, take that Nicholas guy hostage, take control of the lobby and then launch the attack from both the inside and out. Gustavo had come up with such a battle plan.

But this failed at the very start. The entrance was locked, and they simply couldn't enter as usual.

"Out of the way!"

Gustavo shoved aside the bemused underlings and stood before the door. Then, he lifted his leg and delivered a kick at the door, the hinges flew and the heavy front door fell straight down.

According to the reports, the workers here, regardless of whether they were reporters or editors, all had guns on them. Gustavo immediately hide behind a pillar by the door, but there wasn't any response from within. A few underlings searched the room holding guns, but in the end didn't see a single person.

There was no sound in the editorial department; on the tables,

everywhere, was a chaotic mess of information, it was just the people who had disappeared.

"Empty? Hm?"

Gustavo called for the underling who had been monitoring this place in secret and seized him by his collar.

"What's this?"

"I- I don't know! I've been watching from outside all the time- no one's come out! I've also sent people to watch the back door and they didn't see anyone come out either!"

"Not a single person has come out?"

Gustavo unhanded his underling, pondering this carefully.

"You said even those reporters in the agency didn't come out?"

This obviously didn't make sense. The front door was locked, as though anticipating that we'd come—- no, they probably knew. If that were the case, had they all escaped?

"…Give the second and third floords another thorough search. If there's not a single person around, then burn down this place for me and go straight to the Gandor Family nest."

Gustavo lit a cigarette and ordered his underlings.

--They've probably escaped. From the rumours I'd thought these guys who only knew how to fight, but I never thought they were smart. Definitely can't let these guys go.

"Doesn't matter, these guys won't leave just like that- it's not too late to round them all up in one fell swoop when the time comes."

As Gustavo cracked his knuckles, he climbed up to the second floor.

<==>

At the same time, the front and back doors of the newspaper agency were respectively guarded by a single person. The fellow guarding the back door was looking around aimlessly when, suddenly, the assassin in the long coat spoke.

"Your boss's is serious, innit he?"

That Mexican girl and the drunkard had just entered with Gustavo, leaving him alone to wait outside.

"Even if it's the outskirts of Chinatown, you're really planning to have a gunfight on this street under broad daylight?"

"That's right, he's that kinda guy. But hey, you sure you don't wanna head in?"

"If we were caught by the police, then I won't be able to explain myself!"

With that, he parted his coat a little. Just one glance was enough to make the gossiping guy gulp. Inside the coat, just the places that could be seen, there were at least ten handguns and rifles.

"This coat alone weighs 30kg. Truth be told, I came today with the aim of approaching 'Vino'. And I only really need just three minutes to escape before the police come."

"You're real serious about this too!"

"All assassins have their sights set on that guy's place."

At the same time, those at the backdoor noticed a few silhouettes coming over.

"Thanks for your work!"

'Freelancer' said cheerily and used his handgun to coerce Roy and Eve into walking through the door.

"Hey, don't you think so too? Mr. Felix. We weren't normal from the very beginning, right? And we don't know when it starts, when our minds become filled with those crazy thoughts, and we can't take it anymore if we don't do a little something, so we do these kinds of jobs, don't you think?"

At his words, ‘Freelancer’ replied carelessly,

“Rather than mouthing off about how 'serious' or 'crazy' you are , it's best to keep it to yourself.”

“Huh?”

“As for why, well, because it's lame.”

The long coat who was struck dumb in an instant watched the ‘ Freelancer’ walk off, before heading into the building himself.

“Eh? So he still ended up going on.”

“Actually, my marksmanship isn’t very good. That's why, my success depends on how many bullets I have.”

While he spoke, he drew out a gun from under his coat, a muscle twitching on his forehead, and gave a bone-chilling smile.

“So, if there’s a gun fight today, just my bullets alone are enough to kill off those pretensious posers. Hahaha!”

Seeing the long-coat assassin about to lose himself to madness, the gossiping underling could only silently watch as he left. After the door closed, he remarked,

“I don't care if you're serious or crazy. What's clear is that you're both a fool and an idiot.”

<==>

"Oh, oh, oh?!"

After the retreat from the sewers was complete, Elean used binoculars to survey the situation at the DD Newspaper Agency on the roof of a building adjacent to the newspaper agency. The present scene unfolding before him made him suddenly widen his eyes.

"This is bad!"

Sweating, he turned to tell Benjamin and the others what he saw.

"Miss Eve and another young man I don't know have been taken into the news agency."

He hadn't finished his sentence and the old steward gave a loud cry. Samasa snatched away the binoculars to attempt to verify this herself.

"Izzit true? Miz an' a young 'un!"

"P-please lend me those for a sec."

Then, Edith too held up the binioculars, and in the lens she saw a familiar set of clothing.

"Roy!"

Before those around her could stop her in time, Edith had ran off to the long flight of stairs that led upwards.

<==>

“Wow, it’s beautiul...”

Ennis couldn’t help but exclaim as she watched the dominos falling one by one.

As the dominos with colour on only one side successively fell, the colour kept changing- a truly beautiful sight.

“The changing dominos. It's exhilarating to watch them change colour in an instant.”

<==>

There was no sign of people on the second floor too, and without noticing it Gustavo and his cohorts had reached a big room on the third floor. This place looked just like a warehouse- a few tables and chairs were placed haphazardly in the room.

“Shit! They fuckin' got away!”

Gustavo roared with fury. At this moment, there was a sound of the door being shut from behind, and all the people looked back at the same time to see a man with fox-like eyes standing there, waving both hands as he said,

“Good day, and thanks for your hard work.”

When they clearly saw this person, some members of Gustavo’s underlings looked noticeably shaken.

“The hell're you?”

Hearing this, it was the fox-eyed man's turn to be surprised.

“Good grief, how can you not even have a clue what your opponent today looks like! ……Which means, even such incompetent people are picking fights with us now. How pathetic of us.”

“What?”

Before he could even get angry, the meaning of the man's words were lost on Gustavo.

Throwing a wide-eyed look at his underlings, Gustavo gave a questioning look of 'who the fuck is he?'.

“C- can’t be! This guy should already be dead! For sure back then, at the entrance of the old bookstore, his neck, was…”

"Was slit. That's certainly the case. Aye, but that's not important- we've come here today to **negotiate**, and we three even specially came here ourselves. We're looking forward to a favourable answer, Mr. Gustavo."

By the time he finished speaking, the number of presences in the room had increased by two. One person was a shadow by the curtains, while the other stood in the shade of the mountains of paper heaped up on the tables, having made their entrances at some unknown point in time. It was as though they had been there from the very beginning.

"You… can't be the three brothers of the Gandor Family?"

While the audience watched them like looking at martians, Gustavo drew out his shotgun from his jacket.

"What d'ya mean, negotiate?"

"No no, it's nothing complicated. And this doesn't concern you, Mr. Gustavo."

Luck simply didn't pay any attention to that block-headed Gustavo, and called loudly to the ten odd men behind him.

"It's a simple question. **Do you want to switch to our side?** That 's all."

At the extremely shocking question, all the people present, except for the three Gandors, were struck dumb.

"You just have to answer 'yes' or 'no'. Very simple, no?"

As they gradually regained their composure, the men started chuckling among themselves.

"Are you an idiot? Something like this…"

Gustavo cut the laughter, and Luck once again opened his mouth to speak.

"**We've already had a little chat with Mr. Bartolo.**"

Hearing this, their gazes were once again drawn to Luck.

"What... what'd you say?"

"Mr. Gustavo, I must say, you have done many a thing behind your boss's back."

"……"

"Well, though they're mostly just trivial matters. Selling drugs on our territory, pretending to play the role of the middleman, and also collecting protection money from places that haven't reported to Mr. Bartolo. Am I right?"

Everytime Gustavo sold drugs to his trusted customers, the price was always higher than what he reported to Bartolo. The drugs wouldn't be directly sold to the junkies, but distributed to lower-ranked people who sold drugs. After filtering down a few times, the price of drugs would multiply several times over, yielding many times more profit than originally obtained. This

was how Gustavo secretly amassed wealth without informing Bartolo.

With this all out in the open, Gustavo and a few other underlings who knew about this became a little irate. Watching all this provoked an uproar from the surrounding people.

"Calm down! You have no evidence! This guy's just trying to confuse us all!"

"Evidence? We currently have people in custody."

"What?"

"We were waiting for all of you to gather here. At this very moment, our men are already on the way to all your drug ' exchanges'. Ah, what a crushing battle!"

The chatter of voices immediately became louder. As though pressing his advantage, Luck continued. They had purposely spread rumours a few days earlier for this very day.

"Those who submit to us now will be free to go after this is over . Those who want to follow us are very welcome, those who want to return to the organization, Mr. Bartolo too won't make things difficult for you. But, if you become enemies with us here---"

Luck paused here, narrowing those fox-like eyes and smiling faintly.

"—If you continue being enemies with us, then you'll become ' Vino''s target."

The clamour died down in that instant, and Gustavo's underlings exchanged looks, obviously unsettled. Seeing such a situation, Gustavo impassively grabbed one of the underlings by his side.

"What's there to think about?"

"Uh…"

Gustavo seized the man by his head using just one hand and slammed it face-down on the floor.

A sickening sound. Even a layman could tell the man's skull had shattered.

"Just whether you want to wipe out all the 'witnesses' today, or if you want to be killed by me right here, right now. Yeah?!"

"How brutal. Your men will hate you, you know."

Gustavo disregarded his provocation, and just glared savagely at the surrounding underlings.

"Whatever, I'll just kill yah three first."

Gustavo declared as he stepped towards Luck.

"All this, even though we clearly said we were here to negotiate . We even made the point not to bring our guns."

“If you used guns, the cops would come immediately. This goes both ways.”

“Certainly.”

“Yes, that's a way of putting it.”

“Yes, then that’s settled!”

With a laugh, Gustavo gave a bright, masochistic smile as he announced,

“**Then I’m the loser.**”

A roar. A tremundous shock reverbrated in the room, and blood sprayed before Gustavo’s eyes.

Luck's head was blown away, and his body lost its balance and crashed against the wall.

“The next ones will be you. Draw your guns! I'll give you that much.”

As Gustavo sprouted old-fashioned lines from several eras ago, he pointed the muzzle at Keith.

Berga walked to Luck's side with a bland expression, and watched his younger brother's severed neck as though waiting for something.

"Ha, though you could take your time saying your farewells to your younger brother too."

Gustavo snorted his laughter as he bore down on Keith, but his footsteps came to a halt at the sound of his underling's startled voice.

"M-Mr. Gustavo, w-wait!

"What, do you really have a death wish?"

"No! Look! Look!"

Gustavo looked back at panic-striken voice, and there, the 'sight' greeted him.

It was an extremely eerie scene.

That strange feeling was just like watching a trip to the moon in movies.

It was the sight of something carried out in complete silence, beginning to gather at the place where Luck's head should have been.

Red flesh, white bone, and the pinkish-white brain matter- as if they were food carried back to the ants' colony, they gathered at

one point. Bone and flesh fitted together into teeth and eyes like a jigsaw puzzle.

"What... the fuck?"

Gustavo felt his throat constrict and desperately swallowed his saliva, but it had no use whatsoever.

"Hey, get up!"

Seeing the fully recovered Luck, Berga lightly prodded his head with a finger.

"Mm…"

Just like waking up from slumber, Luck stretched. Keith and Berga watched Luck as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"I've really become retarded- I couldn't even dodge this!"

Luck stood up as though nothing had happened and continued lecturing the audience in the room, who were all too scared out of the wits to speak.

"Hm, what're you going to do? Come to our side now or stay here and die?"

Confronted with this monster that should only exist in movies, Gustavo's underlings couldn't even articulate their words- their

wits were completely shattered, and they simply couldn't fight anymore. Suddenly, a figure flew out from the crowds and, in an instant, came to Luck's side. A silver arc glided over his wrist.

"Uh…"

The sleeve of Luck's suit fell, then, a red line spurted out from his wrist. He hastily clamped it with his other hand- if he had been a little later, the hand would have fallen to the floor.

Seeing the flow of blood stopping immediately, the Mexican girl whistled in admiration.

"What an interesting body, *amigo*!"

Luck didn't even have time to evade the earlier attack, and he wasn't sure he could see it clearly again the next time it came.

Narrowing his eyes at this unexpected ambush, Luck remained calm as he asked,

"If you want to become friends, shouldn't you be standing on our side, Miss?"

Hearing Luck's words, the girl shook her head as she gave a sweet, innocent smile.

"Can't do that, *amigo*. If I did then wouldn't I be unable to see ' Vino'? But if I continued killing you here, I should be able to meet him."

So that was how it was. Luck understood.

Although he knew that she had been hired to help, he never thought there'd be assassins like this other than Claire. Now that he looked closer, there was still one person among the crowd who kept his cool, a man holding a little flask of liquor, but it was possible that he was just drunk.

As though intent on barging in on his thought processes, another person came through the door.

"Excuse me, sorry for interrupting!"

It was a bearded man wearing glasses with a man and woman in tow.

The two were unfamiliar faces to Luck and Keith. One was a young lady who was young enough to still be described as a girl, while the other was a rather unhealthy-looking young man.

Behind them, a fellow wearing a long coat entered the room hot on their heels. The man's eyes were filled with hatred, and for some reason his ferocious gaze was directed at the bearded, bespectacled man.

"These two are Eve Genoard and Roy Maddock."

Certain that the appearance of 'Freelancer' would turn the tables, Gustavo regained his composure.

"You're a lifesaver, Freelancer!"

"Then, my work is done."

"Wait! I still have another task for you… it's not killing. Making those guys unable to move should still be within the scope of your work, right?!"

Hearing Gustavo's question, the man gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"Of course, I most certainly can?"

When he heard that, Gustavo gave a triumphant smile. On the other hand, Luck and his brothers were staring at this person in utter disbelief.

"Then I'll leave it to you, Mr. Felix Walken! Name your price!"

"3 trillion US dollars!"

"……Huh?"

It was a unit he had never heard of before. Had he heard wrongly?

"Of course it'll cost this much when facing these three people. Haha!"

As 'Freelancer' spoke, he ushered Eve and Roy out to the corridor, telling them, *go hide, go on'*.

"Hey! What'd ya think you're doing?!"

"Well, I only promised to bring them here."

Having watched up to here, Berga, who had not uttered a word, said bewilderedly,

"What the hell're you up to, dressed in that get-up?"

"?!!?"

Ignoring Gustavo, whose thoughts were in utter chaos, the Mexican girl spun her sword as she asked Luck,

"Hey, where's 'Vino'? Call him out quickly, *amigo*!"

In response, the bearded, bespectacled man raised his hand.

"Calling me?"

The room froze over.

The 'Freelancer' plucked off his glasses and ripped off the fake beard stuck to his mouth.

"Ow, owowow."

Revealing a very youthful face of a young man as he massaged his cheeks.

He spread out both hands as he gave the surrounding people a simple greeting.

"Hello everyone, I'm Felix Walken--- and also 'Vino'. Though it's also okay if you call me 'Rail Tracer'."

While speaking, his tone of voice and mannerisms changed, heralding the descent of the greatest villain onto the negotiation grounds.

Gustavo instantly became flustered and his face drained of colour. After slowly coming to terms with what had happened, his face once again turned from white to red.

"Then, wait a minute, wait! Dammit, Gandor! Was this all part of your strategies?"

Luck and the others too exchanged looks between themselves as Gustavo hollered.

"Claire, who's this Felix?"

"I said before, Claire's already dead. I'm now called Felix Walken. To be precise, it's the newly registered name bought from the original Mr. Felix."

"I totally don't get what you're saying!"

Berga didn't bother disguising his confusion when onfronted with the nonchalently speaking Claire, who claimed he was Felix.

"Didn't Luck say so a few days ago? I can't marry without official registration! I felt he was correct."

Not a single person watching 'Vino' chatter nonstop understood what he was saying.

"Yup, yesterday, I received two pieces of information from here - one regarding the woman I was searching for and the other was about a 'guy who wanted to forget his past'. I went to negotiate with that guy. He was a good fellow, the original Mr. Felix. Then, those guys there came to find Felix, saying they wanted him to kill someone. I too wanted to see what kind of ill-natured opponents there were this time, so…"

As he finished his monologue, 'Vino''s right hand made a sudden movement.

A small handgun appeared in his hand at the same time as two crisp sounds rang out.

The bullets sped through the gaps in the crowd, racing straight towards one man.

Krash

Sounding at the same time as the gunshots was the liquor bottle in the old man's hand. In the blink of the eye, the old man's body toppled to the ground.

Gripped in his right hand still holding onto a smoking handgun .

Fresh bullet holes had made their mark on the wall behind Claire, narrowly missing the point between his eyes.

Could it be, this 'Vino' man was the same kind of monster as Luck and his brothers?

Or maybe this man was the real leader of the monsters!

Gustavo's underlings were long stupefied by the shock and didn't react at all to the sound of gunshots. Facing the crowd who had already become like an audience, 'Vino' said a classic line just like the actor in the movie,

"You ain't heard nothing yet!"

<==>

The guard at the back door saw a woman run over and quickly stopped barred her way.

“Get lost!”

“What’re you saying, you old hag!”

He pulled out his gun, intending to intimidate Edith, when suddenly, someone behind him patted his shoulder.

“Ah, who? M- Mr. Begg!”

Begg regarded Edith with a strange expression, and said with his hoarse voice,

“You, must, be, Roy’s friend!”

Although nothing could be read from that person’s eyes, Edith refused to be beaten and continued staring back at him, nodding. Then, Begg ordered that underling,

“Let, her, in!”

<==>

The one to break the silence was the katana-wielding Mexican girl.

"Hahahahahaha! Interesting, really interesting, *amigo*! Are you ' Vino' or Felix? That's to say, if I kill you, then I can surpass the ranks of two assassins in one shot."

"Ah, that's how it is!"

'Vino' scratched his head as he glanced sideways at Luck, asking,

"Eh, who should I kill?"

It was just like a line out of a movie. But when one examined the surroundings, there wasn't any will to fight left. Only Gustavo had his gun pointed at them, hesitating over whether to attack or not. It was possible that he just had to depress the trigger slightly to become the target of 'Vino''s bullets. Being able to pull of something like that despite having so many openings earlier, if he were to act carelessly, he feared he would only be killed. Gustavo's instincts keenly sensed this.

"I think the police are coming soon, so if possible I'd like to solve this manner in a more conservative fashion. ---Didn't I say so before?"

"So troublesome! …Ah yes, the two people I brought in just now- I'm not too clear who they are, but they seem to be Kate's guests."

"Huh?"

"I think it's best to ensure their safety."

Hearing this, Luck hastily walked towards the corridor. As he left, he glared at Claire, protesting,

"Why didn't you say so earlier! Honestly!"

Keith darted a quick look to the side after hearing Kate's name, and frowned a little. The next instant, when he saw Luck leaving the room, Gustavo immediately ran towards the opposite door.

"Don't run!"

'Vino' lifted his handgun, about to aim, when a silver light flashed and the handgun hit the ground. During this interval, Gustavo had escaped through the door. The Mexican girl, flourishing the katana, gave a whistle with a little surprise.

"Nicely done, *amigo*! I had wanted to cut your wrist."

"You'd even cut your 'amigo's?

"Sorry, this sword moved by itself!"

The Mexican girl said the excuse she's made quite a few times, and slashed at him when she judged the time was right.

"If possible, I hope you'll surrender! I'm not the type who likes killing their own 'amigo's."

"Ah~~! Don't treat me like an idiot just because I'm a woman! I' ll get angry, *amigo*."

She had just finished speaking when the blade sketched out a beautiful curve of silver light, swinging towards him.

Kriiiii!

With the sound of metal scraping on metal, the girl's katana stopped right before 'Vino''s face.

<==>

"Huh? This is strange..."

In the Gandor Family office, Tick shook his head in disbelief, saying

"I seem to be missing a few pairs of my new scissors!"

<==>

---What happened? Why did it stop!?

Gazing at the girl with wide eyes, 'Vino''s eyes gradually sharpened, and he replied blandly,

"I didn't look down on you because you're a girl. There are skilled experts among women, and I also respect those women greatly."

'Vino' remarked as though nothing special was happening, all the while using the scissors in his hand to parry the Mexican girl's sword and stop the sword's movements.

"I treated you like an idiot because you were too weak!"

The girl's sword was locked in the vice-like grip of the scissors. Impossible, this was impossible! She was a little panicky, but she didn't lose any faith in herself. She immediately released her right hand so she held the clamped sword in her left, and drew out another sword with her right hand and sliced at 'Vino''s waist.

Krii K-k-k-kriiiiii

'Vino' also used his left hand to take out another pair of scissors, and clamped this sword too.

"I see, this sword really isn't much!"

As the four- no, six to be precise- blades clashed together, one figure locked onto the two of them as targets.

The assassin in the long coat drew out two shotguns from within his coat and aimed at 'Vino'. At this moment, the Mexican girl was also within the target range, but he pulled hard on the triggers as though he didn't see her.

In that instant, a tall, large shadow pounced in from the side

His hands were squeezed down and forced the muzzles of the two guns downwards.

The room resounded with the sound of gunfire, and the cement floor became peppered with holes.

Some pellets from the buckshots rebounded, piercing the feet of the two men.

"AaaaaAAAAaaaah!"

The long-coat assassin gave a long wail, but the man forcing the handguns down— Berga merely clenched his teeth as he kept his ground.

"Guaah! ---Can't you feel the pain? You crazy bastard!"

At Berga's illogical shout, the long-coat assassin cried out with tears in his eyes,

"Aaaaaaaaaah! Just what are you, aaaah!"

The man writhing on the ground once again drew out guns from within his coat and continued shooting at Berga. Berga's body became ridden with quite a few holes and blood spurted out. The blood that fell onto the floor immediately returned to Berga's body, but long-coat didn't notice this at all. He emptied one gun and immediately took out another, continuing to fire at Berga. Even so, Berga didn't fall but welcomed the bullets, and swung his fist forcefully.

"Stop i----------t!"

With the cry, the fists were hit by the bullets. He watched as flesh was blown off, revealing the bone within. But even so, the fists never stopped. Berga used all the strength in his body to punch down viciously on the long-coat's face.

--I'm finished.

This was long-coat's last thought before he lost consciousness.

<==>

"Ha, these are clearly scissors!"

In the endless ringing of metal meeting metal, the victory had already decided.

Then, the blades briefly met, then the four weapons entwined again, and once again were anchored in the blink of an eye. The instant the girl shifted her weight backwards to gain some distance , 'Vino' lifted his foot and kicked the girl's wrist.

"Ow!"

The katana fell from her hand. 'Vino' continued and kicked his foot at the other hand.

Claire didn't use a lot of force, and it shouldn't be enough to kick down the sword, but because the girl had been swinging the swords around for a long time, her hands no longer had the strength to keep a hold on them.

"So this is it!"

"Ah…"

As though merely ending a game, 'Vino' held the scissors against the girl's exposed, chestnut-coloured neck.

When he was sure the Mexican girl no longer had any intention to fight any further, Claire turned his head to say to Gustavo's unmoving underlings in the room,

"Hey, what're you guys planning to do?"

Hearing this, a few people in the crowd stood up and said to Keith,

"Then, we'll be taking our leave!"

"What?"

Faced with such a wholly unexpected answer, 'Vino' made a rare, nonplussed sound. Keith silently nodded and these people left the room. Among the crowd, there were some fellows who simply didn't understand what had happened. Those were the few people who, when Luck pointed out Gustavo's betrayal, created the commotion.

Watching this group of people leave the room, whether it was ‘ Vino’ or the Mexican girl, all revealed looks of suspicion and scepticism.

“What’s this about?”

At ‘Vino’’s question, Keith still didn’t say a single word. Berga, who had watched everything, replied impatiently,

“Didn’t we tell you? Among them, half are ‘undercover agents' arranged in our negotiation with Bartolo.”

“Isn't that a bit too many?”

“Just goes to show how unpopular he was.”

“I see—That……”

‘Vino’ suddenly put emphasis on his last words. He dodged beautiful to one side, simultaneously hurling the scissors in his hands. The girl’s body stiffened at the sight of the scissors racing straight towards her. At the same time, the gunshots picked up again. Bullets from the other side of the room closed in on the person facing the girl who had thrown the scissors-‘Vino’. The bullets passed through the spot ‘Vino’ had been standing at all along, whizzing through the Mexican girl’s hair and punched straight into the wall. The scissors, spinning parallel to the floor, pierced the shoulder of the long-coat man. A man had grabbed the long-coat assassin’s clothes and used the already unconscious man as a shield.

That was the person who had initially been thought to be shot down, the old drunkard. His short frame hid behind long-coat, still surrounded by the white smoke of gunpowder.

"Haha!"

'Vino' laughed lightly, throwing his scissors to seal his opponent's movements while rolling on the ground to retrieve the handgun that had been struck down earlier. The instant he stopped rolling, gunshots once again sounded ceaselessly in the room, filling the place with the smell of gunpowder. The paths of the bullets forced straight lines, traversing endlessly between the two.

'Vino' twisted his body to evade the bullets, while bullets fired at the old man all hit long-coat's body. Because there were many guns stored within the coat, it had become the best shield- the long-coat assassin himself hadn't been hurt at all. When the two had both run out of bullets, 'Vino' said happily,

"As I thought. I was thinking it was strange that your reactions were so normal, gramps. When we met at the hotel just now, I felt you were the strongest of the three."

At 'Vino''s words, the old drunk replied with a low laugh,

"You really do live up to your reputation. Now I can feel at ease - if I killed you, then I can become famous."

"Ah, wait a minute, gramps! Isn't your owner finished? And he's been chased out of the organization, so I'm afraid he won't be

able to pay your reward. You're still going to keep fighting despite that?"

"Personally, I'm just interested in your head!"

"Oh! Really?"

'Vino' shook his head, and with a *snicker-snack*, drew out another pair of scissors.

"Then, you're not planning to betray your employer, who can be said to no longer exist?"

Having obtained the old man's definitely answer, 'Vino' stared at the old man with a look of incomprehension.

"Why?"

This time, even 'Vino' seemed at a loss. The old man gazed at the the young man standing on the other side of the room.

"Isn't running away or giving up better? Because you aren't as strong as me. Because you're weak, so even betrayal's not something you can help but do. Isn't that the natural course of things?"

"Young man…… don't you understand? As an assassin, what we're proudest of—"

Hearing this, 'Vino' exploded with laughter.

"Hahahahahahahahahaha! Hahahahahahahahahaha! It's, it's too funny, really interesting, you're a real interesting gramps!"

"What're you laughing about?"

There was discontent on the old man's face, and he plucked a knife from his breastpocket. Even when he saw that 'Vino' didn't stop laughing, twisting his face as he continued,

"What pride? What dignity? For assassins like you and I to actually talk about these things, it's hilarious, really hilarious!"

'Vino' glanced at the old man and the Mexican girl, and snorted disdainfully. Pinned with such a manner by 'Vino', the Mexican girl hastily ducked out of his sight.

'Vino''s eyes became stranger still, completely different from when he was fighting earlier. The gaze projected by the two black holes on his face seemed to want to drink up all the darkness, as though wanting to suck in human souls, just like a demon revealing its evil nature.

"From the very day you regarded killing as a kind of profession , things like pride are no longer an issue for us! Wake up! The very moment you kill a person, you'll become less than the scum of human society! Is this a battlefield? Will you get medals for killing people? Yes, I am the strongest. You think you'll raise your fame if you killed me, 'Vino'? But, isn't it **just that**? You think that, if you betray others, then it'll lower your trustworthiness? This kind of stuff never existed from the very start. Assassins are assassins--

just where in the world do you think people who trust in social rejects like us exist?"

The denial of assassins came from the assassin said to be the strongest. The old man and the Mexican girl naturally couldn't even come up with a single retort.

"If you think what I'm saying is trash, or you don't want to believe it, then fine, we're enemies. If you think I'm wrong, then use your strength to prove your pride! Since failures are failures anyway, so think carefully!"

The provocation suddenly came to an unexpected stop.

Pressed against the back of 'Vino''s head was a gleaming, black handgun. Feeling the muzzle touching his hair, 'Vino' said without any trace of surprise or fear,

"Keith!"

From behind came a brotherly answer.

"Don't mock the living."

At Keith's words, the world's most terrifying assassin merely closed his eyes and sighed his reply,

"But they're fundamentally different from you……"

"Doesn't change a thing."

He chose the bare minimum of words, not giving 'Vino' any chance to counter.

"We're all the same—- we're villains."

'Vino' didn't care the slightest about the gun aimed at his head, scratching his head as he turned around and looked into Keith's eyes, the murderous intent from earlier no longer present.

"I understand, sorry. **You** too are someone beset by honour and pride."

Whether deep in his heart, or in 'Vino''s— Claire's tone of voice, there wasn't the slightest trace of mockery.

Suddenly, Keith's eyes flared with killing intent and he charged straight at Claire's side.

With a heavy thud, Claire sensed something behind him.

Without any unease or questions, he turned around and saw the scene he had expected to see.

Taking advantage while Claire and Keith weren't paying him attention, the old man who had attacked from the back had already been forcefully kicked to the ground by Keith. Then, Keith relentlessly stomped down on his chest. The old man let out a weak moan, sprawled on the floor and unable to move.

"Have some pity for the poor old man!"

Staring at Claire, who laughed as he spoke, Keith said expressionlessly,

"……Enemies are enemies!"

Hearing Keith's response, Claire gave a satisfied smile.

"You're probably the only one who's anything like the Mafia."

"Right! What're you planning to do, missy?"

Berga, who had been watching all this happen, asked the Mexican girl who had retrieved her katanas.

"……So cool!"

"Huh?"

Ignoring the frowning Berga, the Mexican girl transfer her gaze to Keith.

"Hey, *amigo*, does what fox-eyes said just now still count?"

<==>

What to do? Mr. Roy disappeared.

Just now, that bearded, bespectacled man bade them to hide, so Eve went to the first floor reception room to hide. But when she turned back to look, she discovered Roy had disappeared. If she went out to look for him now, then she would definitely run into difficulties. The gunshots on the third floor could still be heard from here, as though she had become lost in an action movie. But she couldn't escape without doing anything. Roy had become involved because she stubbornly insisted that 'I want to meet the Gandor people', so she couldn't just hide here by herself.

If I can't find him...

Eve had just opened the reception room door by a tiny fraction when a silhouette appeared on the window of the door. At first she thought it was Roy, but the head was too big. The moment she sensed danger and wanted to move away from the doorway, the door was kicked in.

"Eek!"

Eve let out a piercing scream and fell to the floor with fright.

The heavy door had slammed straight into where she had been standing. The inlaid glass on the door shattered, sending shards flying everywhere, and even the handle broke into many pieces and rolled around on the ground.

"Don't scream, little missy!"

Gustavo had to bend down to slip in through the doorway, which was not at all small, his eyes vacant and giving off an animalistic aura.

"I initially thought this would be a simple matter, but it seems things have become tricky."

As he shook his head, he slowly advanced on Eve, who was inching towards the wall.

"Should I say this is the first time we've met? Mistress of the Genoards, you actually dared to trick me- don't get too full of yourself!"

I don't understand what he's talking about. Who on earth is this man?

Eve only knew one thing: there was nothing in this man's eyes; only a terrifying hatred as he glared at her.

"What ever did I do to you? I just wanted to survive, that's all. Was there really such a need to waste lives over those kinds of useless things?"

The man held a handgun in his hand, and slowly aimed at Eve's face.

"Unless… don't tell me you're a monster too."

Eve shrank fearfully into a ball- she wanted to run but her feet wouldn't move. Seeing Eve in this state, Gustavo said with relief,

"Oh! Seems like you're not! Now I can relax!"

Although busting your head in doesn't seem half bad, this wouldn't be making good use of you.

---I want to kill you in front of those Gandors. No matter what the means, I'll just have to kill everyone to walk down this path. Running, dying; I've had enough- I want to kill off all those who plotted against me, and those useless underlings, that Begg guy; I won't let even Bartolo off the hook.

To prevent her from escaping, Gustavo raised his leg high, intending to shatter the bones in her leg.

"This is for the bar!"

With this came an attack. The back of Gustavo's head was hammered, and the enormous body shook.

"This is for the casino!"

Next, the right side of his face received the brunt of the second attack; it felt like it was inflicted by some sharp instrument. What was more intense than the pain was the feeling of being hit head-on by a red-hot metal bat. He lost his grip on the handgun, which clattered to the floor and discharged, shooting his hand. Accompanied by the biting pain was the feeling that the flesh in his hand had been exposed to air.

"This is for the race course!"

He turned his head towards the voice and was struck by the fist of the voice's owner, just like that. The fist had just whistled past when a counter-shaped weapon came swinging back- so he was being beat up by the wooden chairs, exclusively used by the editorial department. His face was clipped by the corner of the chair, and Gustavo knew that his cheekbone had been shattered. Now, he could no longer control his torso and could only rely on the strength of his lower half of his body to keep himself on his feet. The chair once again flew at his face.

"This is for Nicola's injuries!"

This last blow was delivered to Gustavo, who had already been beaten to the ground, by Luck. Grasping the leg of the chair in two hands and raising it over his head, he faced the almost unconscious Gustavo and mercilessly swung down with all his might.

"Go Die! This is for my head!"

This sudden unforeseen event shocked Eve to the point where she could only watch dumbly. She watched as a fox-eyed man appeared behind the tall, big man, and gave Gustavo's face a good do-over with ruthless techniques she had never seen before.

When Gustavo was fully incapacitated, he finally seemed to notice her. His gaze shifted somewhat awkwardly, yet in the next instant he stretched out a hand towards Eve.

"Ah, I saw he was about to kill you so I acted- it counts as legitimate defense!"

Eve stared at the man, who was faintly smiling at her, unable to articulate her thanks no matter how hard she tried.

"Oh! Um, you don't have to be so scared!"

Luck seemed to be rather perplexed as he regarded the girl before his eyes.

"How troublesome. I didn't mean to scare you." <--! 为: this is so hard to find the appropriate word for… It means it's troublesome, difficult and awkward, and Luck doesn't know what to do… -- 'troublesome' seems to tbe the popular usage of this word, so I just went with that Starkiller4299 18:58, 24 January 2011 (UTC)-->

In any case, he had to get her to stand up before continuing. He held out a hand to help Eve up, but she didn't take it. She may very well have placed her hand there if it was someone else, but she had no reason to do so now.

"You must be Mrs. Kate's guest- I'm the younger brother, Luck Gandor." <--! I know there's a gender change… possibly referring to Keith? Unless Luck views Kate as his older sister, which is

highly unlikely (seeing as they knew each other for less than 4 years) -- made it gender neutral to read more easily-->

Hearing Luck's words, the girl before his eyes stopped trembling.

---Wonderful, Mrs. Kate's name finally made you relax!

Although that was what Luck thought, the look in Eve's eyes was definitely not one of relief.

"Um…… Mr. Gandor, um, is the leader of that Mafia family, right?"

"Mafia and leader, you say…? I guess that's more or less true."

"Please! There's something… there's something I have to ask you."

With a kind of 'apprehension', the girl asked Luck the question the answer she most wanted to know.

"My older brother--- Brother Dallas, is he still alive?"

After hearing the details from Eve, memories of the past came rushing back.

Dallas. Luck never thought he'd hear this name at a time like this.

Because this girl wanted to look for her brother, she became involved in such a dangerous situation.

Even though she knew the dangers, she didn't care and threw herself straight in- what courage!

This was why the fear vanished from her face. And this fact alone was proof enough that she had a certain amount of understanding of the situation.

Luck studied Eve, knowing that shoddy lies or misdirection wouldn't work. Even if he tricked her, she would still continue the difficult life of searching for her brother.

He hardened his resolve, looked at the determined Eve, and told her part of the story.

"Whether you believe it or not, this may be an extremely brutal fact for you-- your brother is no longer an ordinary human being."

A year ago, her older brother had become involved in some incident, and through gaining the power of incomplete ' immortality' he became indestructible. Then, he used that ability to kill four of Luck's good friends. After that— as atonement, they sunk him, alive and kicking, into the icy depths of the river.

To convince Eve, who initially didn't believe in immortal bodies , Luck took out his knife and cut off his own finger; it grew back immediately. Seeing this, even though she was a little repulsed by it, Eve had no choice but to believe him.

Eve's emotions had become very complicated. She was extremely happy learning that her brother was alive, but she couldn't help but hate this person before her for putting her brother through inhuman treatment. But it was also a fact that her brother killed his friends. Eve knew best the kind of man her brother was, and the helpless Eve knew that her brother did deserve his fate. Although Eve fully understood everything on a rational level, she simply couldn't to terms with it emotionally.

"Why--- Why? Why make my brother suffer in that way? Wouldn't it have been better to let the police deal with him? It's- it' s, clearly more than enough, so please, my brother, please forgive my brother and the others. At least, at least use the law to sanction him. I'm begging you, begging you!"

Confronted by the somewhat incoherent girl, Luck was at a complete loss as to what to do.

In some ways what Eve had said was right, and Luck also knew this. But, just as personal feelings roiled within Eve, Luck too was just acting according to his own emotions. Because the most furious among the brothers in that incident were not his older brothers, but Luck himself.

"You can't begin to understand our world. I was just speaking about my own feelings— a fury and rage that cannot be appeased. Firstly, even if they were to be sanctioned and punished by law, my dead friends won't come back anymore. I simply cannot forgive this, that's all. If you want to hate me then hate me. Just like how your brother can't come back, the dead can no longer return. My pain will never go away."

Luck's emotions seem to burst from their dam as he spoke in a cool and calm tone. Even now, his rage at his friends' murder still hadn't eased. But he could understand what she was saying, whereas regular Mafia would have killed this girl long ago. And for this reason, Claire declared he was 'unsuited to being Mafia'.

"Oh really? That's just your side of things! So I don't understand your world or your feelings. So your pain is healed. What about my feelings? I just- I just want my brother, I want you to give my brother back to me."

Eve's anger was normal- Luck listened quietly without answering.

"I'm begging you! Just let go of my brother- I'm willing to take on any amount of suffering, so please, listen…"

Hearing Eve's words, Luck's expression became very grim and he added an edge to his voice when he spoke.

"Don't think that alone is enough to change my decision! …… Forget it. If you want revenge, I'll take it on, any amount of it. But target me only! If you touch even a hair on the other people's---"

He stopped halfway through his speech. What am I saying? There isn't anything worth talking about anymore. Luck shook his head and stood up.

"If you change your mind a few years from now--- then maybe, until then…"

It appeared Eve wouldn't give up so easily- this wasn't something that could be helped either. If she had the least bit of common sense, she should have given up by now.

"Oh!"

Alarm suddenly flooded Eve's eyes. By the time he noticed the figure standing behind him, it was too late. Luck's head was slammed by the reception room sofa, and for a moment he hovered on the edge of consciousness.

The bloody-faced Gustavo had raised an enormous sofa almost as tall as him, which must have weighed over a hundred kilograms, and flung it at him. Luck also swung a chair at about the same time, but because it was too light, it was knocked back. Luck, hit by that horizontal force, was flung back.

"Ugh……!"

Luck's back crashed against the wall, and the strong impact jostled his body. He stood up, wobbling, watching Gustavo. The bloody-faced man glared back at Luck, burning with the desire to kill.

"Beg… This, that, anything, just come and beg meeeeeeeeeeee!
"

Gustavo hurled the chair onto the floor, shouting loudly. Then he suddenly smiled, and in the most evil tone of voice he said,

"I wring your head again and again, grind it, deep fry it then lock it in a safe and throw it into the sea!"

"This is bad… Damn it, he's clearly more Berga-bro's kind of opponent."

Luck wiped his sweat, and drew out a handgun from inside his jacket.

"You're real troublesome guy- I wanted to let you live, but you keep coming and looking for death."

"Looks like a peaceful settlement is out of question."

Luck shook his head and pulled the trigger at Gustavo, who was lunging at him. Gunshots rang out in succession, and six holes were punched in Gustavo's body; all the bullets pierced the chest, abdomen, and other fatal points, so he should be dead beyond any doubt. But Gustavo didn't stop moving.

"It's useless useless useless useless useless useless useless! Small fry like you, fuckin' small fry don't deserve to live! Bullets are uselessssssssssssss!" <--!Lit: live in my face-->

"How can this be?"

Luck was punched in his abdomen and he fell to the ground, and Gustavo used the force that destroyed the door on kicking Luck's face. He stomped on Luck's body lying on the ground with his huge feet, over and over again.

"Vanish, vanish, vanish, vanish, vanish from my sight!"

Making strange, inhuman sounds, Gustavo shattered Luck's ribs with his kicks- crack crick crack. When he was sure Luck could no longer move, Gustavo turned to Eve and smiled cruelly. Once again, Eve was frozen with fear. <--!Chinese gives 'pala pala' , which sounds rather… melodious for breaking bones?-->

"It's your turn, little missy! I'll throw you into New York Bay to feed the fish, just like your father and brother."

For a moment, Eve didn't understand what he was saying.

"Why that expression? You still don't know? If you know you'll definitely want to kill me later!"

Seeing the girl's slowly reddening face, Gustavo realised that she really didn't know about the matter.

"Ha! If you don't know then lemme tell you. Your pops and bro stopped me from producing a new drug, so I killed them both with my own hands! After drowning them I chopped them up and turned them into fish bait, then I tossed them bit by bit into the sea. "

Eve listened to Gustavo's leering recount, the 'meaning' of those words slowly sinking into her mind. When the implications finally clicked into place, her mind immediately went blank.

All sorts of scenes appeared in Eve's mind. And in that instant, a weak voice spoke up in the room.

"Don't talk about what you don't know."

There, behind Gustavo, stood Luck, his ribs already restored. He didn't seem to have fully recovered, since his breathing was a little fast, and it was obvious just standing took up a lot of effort.

"Not only do the bottom feeders of society like you break the law, you kill and even sprout nonsense with no shame at all. It's precisely because of this that you were abandoned by Bartolo and your men." <--!*lit: not do legal work-->

"You fucking brat…"

Angered by his words, Gustavo charged at Luck, seizing him up by his jacket and throwing him in Eve's direction. His thin, weak body flew at Eve and his back smacked against the edge of the table next to Eve.

"So useless even though you're armed- don't you think I'll win?"

Feeling that he had gained the upper hand, Gustavo slowly regained his wits.

"The girl's useless too. Let's kill them off together!"

He bowed his head and started looking for the gun that had fallen onto the ground. But for some unknown reason, the gun had disappeared.

At this moment, Luck murmured to Eve,

"I'll hold him- run when you get a chance! If it's Claire, it's still possible to fight this monster—"

Luck turned to face Eve, enduring the pain in his back, his voice a little shaky. Then---

"Miss Eve!"

"Brat!"

Gustavo also noticed at the same time.

Eve's expression was startlingly serene. Tears streamed from her eyes as she held a gun in her hands and aimed at Gustavo's body. Her eyes were fixed on Gustavo, and she spoke softly to Luck. That voice was extremely calm, as though she had already distanced herself from her original emotions. The tear-filled eyes were vacant, as though gazing at a faraway place.

"Mr. Luck, I'm sorry. I'm truly very sorry. Even though I said all those selfish things to you just now, even though I thought I was doing the right thing, even so, now, I actually can't forgive this person--- I absolutely cannot forgive him."

At this moment, Eve's eyes held steely conviction. Absolutely devoid of fear: a pair of pitch-black eyes.

"It's only now that I finally understand what you were just saying, so, so…"

With large drops of tears falling from her face, Eve pulled hard at the trigger.

"You little bitch! You think you can knock me down with that kinda thing? Ridiculous- shoot me, kill me, take revenge for your stupid father, you shitty brat!"

At Gustavo's provocation, Eve pulled the trigger with no hesitation whatsoever.

With the thunder of the gunshot, blood mist sprayed into the air of the reception room.

Eve's body jerked back from the recoil, which was much smaller than it should have been.

Eve slowly opened her eyes, but standing there was Luck, the place where his left hand should be spurting blood. His left hand had fallen onto the ground, revealing bone that had been shattered by the bullet.

Luck's right hand was pulling at the handgun, pointing the muzzle at his own left hand.

Gazing steadily at the stunned Eve, Luck slowly stood up, sweating heavily.

"……I know your pain!"

Then, he turned to Gustavo, who was shrinking back from where he stood, scooping up his left hand as he rushed over.

"You sunnova bitch! What're you gonna do?"

Luck thrust his broken-off left hand at the beefy man, who had bunched up fists.

Unlike those fists, the jagged bone closed those few extra millimeters and stabbed into Gustavo's throat.

"_____"

When certain that massive body wouldn't move anymore, Luck said, his eyes cold,

"This is thanks for sending someone to slit my throat."

Luck pressed his left hand against the ragged wound on his arm , and turned to face Eve.

"You're not hurt--- right?"

Unable to take the pain anymore, Luck passed out after that question.

<==>

--What to do? We got separated.

When Roy, planning to hide together with Eve Genoard, darted inside, he could no longer see any sign of Eve. Had she fallen behind? Or had she escaped inside first? Once past this corner, he should be able to escape out of the door he had been taken through when entering the building. But there was still a guard with a gun there. It would be impossible for him to escape by himself. So, he couldn't leave through there for the time being- that should be the state of things.

But he couldn't head back to the earlier room either. Quite a few gunshots had sounded moments ago, and also there were also some unknown *kachi kachi* metallic sounds.

I can't run. No matter how I look at it, she became involved in all this because of me. So all the more reason not to run.

His rational mind understood all this, but he still wanted to escape. In his heart, he felt that it couldn't be helped if he ran.

--Ah, I can't. How can I fall so low? Damn, damn, drugs, when I was taking drugs, you made me capable of doing anything. No matter what it

was, I could do it all. Clearly, I was equal to all of them. But what is up with this drastic difference? Damn! Why can't I do what I'm clearly capable of doing? Isn't this too strange?

The frustrated Roy heard someone calling from somewhere.

"……R-, Roy!"

---Damn, it's Edith's voice. Am I hallucinating? Don't think any further! If, if I can't rely on Edith then I can accomplish anything. Ah, that's how it is. Then just what is happening? ---Damn, it's Edith's voice . I'm hearing things. Stop it, self! Do you think I'm someone who can't accomplish anything without Edith's requests? Ah, that's how it is. Why is that?

But stop it with that, now I must do it by myself, me alone, by myself---

"Roy!"

This time, Roy finally regained consciousness. Because he was receiving the full force of Edith's open-handed slaps.

"Get a grip, you fool!"

Edith smacked Roy's cheeks countless times. Every time she used the back of her hand, the bones there ached terribly from hitting his cheekbones.

"E- Edith!"

"You bastard- why, why do you keep helping others even though you're so weak? You still gonna involve people you don't know so carelessly next time? What happened to your promise? You must keep promises you've made with others! Didn't I say that I'll help you, that I'll protect you? So don't run all over the place anymore!"

Edith straddled Roy's body, speaking as she hit Roy, then finally hugged him tightly.

"It's my fault. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry!"

--Ah, a good-for-nothing. I'm, really a good-for-nothing. If I had to say why I felt I was a good-for-nothing, it'd be because I can only think of these words at times like this.

At the same time, someone he didn't recognise appeared behind Edith.

"You, are, Mister, Roy?"

Interrupted by a soft voice- it looked like an unhealthy-looking man was calling my name.

"Wh-What, do you want?"

"I, am, Begg. Bu-, but, I'm not, an, ordina, ry, man. It's, possible, that it's just, the side, effect, of those drugs. You, exhi, bited, unusually, strong, reactions."

At first it was purely interesting. Although it was someone who had taken the new drug I had manufactured, I never thought there 'd be such a daring person. In fact, this was only somewhat stronger than the ordinary banned drugs, but I never thought this man would become reckless enough to snatch these drugs from the hands of the Runorata Family. It was possible that he was originally a violent man. In that case, it would only be natural to lose himself once he took just this little bit of stimulent. So I continued finding out about you in 'society', and I never thought I' d become more and more interested in you.

The sedative-type new drug, which normally wore out in less than two hours, rendered this Roy fellow unable to return to reality from 'that world' for more than three days. Compared with other drugs, Begg found that his own concocted drugs frequently triggered much stronger reaction, though he didn't know if it was due to psychological or physical reasons. This reaction, if it was this kind of reaction, then it should be that Roy himself didn't want to return to the real world!

Begg drew out an elastic band and a syringe from his breastpocket and handed them to Roy.

"This, is, a drug, inject, this!"

Looking at the syringe and elastic band Begg suddenly gave him, Roy didn't understand what this was about.

"This, is stronger, than the, usual, drug, you take, this is, a blend, of, stimu, lents, and the, drug I, made, if you, use this, you, might, no, longer, be, able, to, re, turn to the, real, world."

At first she didn't understand what Begg was talking about, but when she finally understood Begg's purpose of coming, she cried out,

"Wait a minute… You, what're you suddenly thinking of! How can…"

In front of Edith, who had stood up in outrage, was Begg's black handgun.

"I'm, sorry, you, don't, have any, right, to refuse."

"Edith!"

Facing Roy, who had hastily scrambled to his feet, Begg grabbed Edith from behind and pointed the muzzle at her temple.

"Let, me, see. The, look on, your, face, as you, die, smiling, the, world, you, exper, ience, let me, see, your joy, your, world!"

Begg placed his finger on the trigger, his tone growing ever more intense.

"The reason… I don't understand the reason why? What's going on, what on earth is going on? Until now, I've always been injecting drugs made by guys like you who don't ask questions! Give me some sort of explanation!"

Begg totally disregarded his yelling, silently lifting the gun.

"Quick, inject it."

Roy felt immense regret.

"I understand… I understand, please don't hurt Edith."

But he couldn't do anything, but simply pick up the elastic band and tie it on his arm. His veins immediately swelled up, and a kind of pressure built up from his fingertips to his arm.

"Stop, stop it, Roy! Don't! You'll die!"

"Swear, you swear first! I, after I inject this, you will definitely let go of Edith, swear it!"

"All, right, I, do, so swear."

Having obtained a definite answer, Roy tightened the elastic band even more. Without hesitating, he picked up the syringe and stabbed it at his own arm. The drug in the syringe slowly emptied into Roy's body, until not a single drop was left.

"Roy!"

Edith shouted, wanting to run to Roy, but Begg didn't let her go , seeming to have forgotten to do so in his excitement.

Begg waited for Roy's reaction to the drug with anticipation, watching him closely.

"Sorry, Edith, I'm so sorry. I still couldn't abide by my promise this time. So, it's, this!"

Not knowing what he was thinking about, Roy lifted his hands high in the air.

"So, there'd no need for you to keep your promise too!"

With that, he used his raised left hand—

---And brought it down hard on the glass window inside the corridor.

A piercing sound rang out and the glass was shattered. Then, Roy used one of the remaining shards of glass on the window and sliced at his wrist; fresh blood immediately spurted out.

"Roy! Roy!"

Edith screamed frenetically. After Begg realised his intentions, a shaken look entered his eyes.

"As, promised, I've already injected it. After this, I, I'm free, right, that's how it is, right."

Soaked in the blood pouring from himself, Roy gave a weak smile.

"That's, no, use, you think, by just, do, ing, that, the drug, will, all, flow out, with, your blood?"

"If I don't try, then I won't know!"

"Fool, why? If, you, do that, then, you won't, be able, to, enter, that, world! Since, you're, going, to die, anyway, don't, you want, to die, happily, don't you, want, to, die in, that world?"

At Begg's question, Roy gave a bloody smile,

"I know best, I know the best about the world I see. Because I've been to that world countless, countless, countless times. That's a world full of joy and nothing else, so I remember it very clearly."

"Then, why?"

"Ah, it's because I remember it so clearly that I don't want to go anymore!"

Roy continued staring at Begg, who still held Edith, speaking as loudly as he could. That voice was just like a cry of triumph against Begg.

"In that world, there isn't the Edith here! I just remember this! So, so release Edith, I'm telling you to let Edith go now!"

Roy ignored his wrist which still dripped blood, advancing on Begg one step at a time.

"Don't, don't destroy my world!"

What Roy had once shouted at Edith, who had called him back from 'that side' of the world, completely destroyed Begg's own world.

If he let Edith go just like that, this man would probably die smiling. This would then totally defeat the purpose of Begg's drug.

If he killed Edith, this guy would die without any hope or happiness.

Either way, both ends were far from what he had hoped for.

Begg descended into self-denial. Intense anger and hatred churned within his heart. He didn't want to forgive Roy, and yet at the same time he wanted to help him no matter what.

---Tell me, Maiza. What should I do? Ah, is this kind of feeling I' m having now the 'impoverishment of the soul' you mentioned to me before? What to do? Tell me, tell me---

He shoved Edith in Roy's direction, and aimed the muzzle at his own head.

"It's, not too, late, if you, go, to, the hos, pital now, before, I, regen, erate. Es, cape, quickly, if, this, goes on, I'll, kill, you both."

Then, he heard a gunshot ring out in the corridor.

With that gunshot, Roy too sank into the darkness.

"Success!"

"Complete success!"

In the Martillo Family-run bar, people were immersed in the feeling of success after all the dominos had fallen.

From the thousands of dominos scattered across the ground, one could clearly see a picture depicted with them.

As everyone in the shop indulged in the joy of success, the only person not to join in this 'ceremony' was Firo, who strangely felt left out.

Because Lia had also participated in this ceremony, she didn't prepare him his lunch.

"S'not bad, it's nothing much!"

Watching Isaac and Miria dancing the Flamenco* on the carpeted floor, Firo said quietly and a little regretfully,

- Spanish dance originating from Andalusia

"Who's going to pick up this stuff!"

His gaze dropped to the floor and Firo noticed something. Originally he thought it was just a simple, geometric shape, and yet now, at the centre was a bird-like figure.

"Mr. Maiza, what's that?"

At Firo's query, the designer of the pattern said embarrassedly,

"Oh! It's a phoenix."

Phoenix. He had heard this word before, but he couldn't recall where from.

"It's the deity worshipped in ancient Phoenicia. At first it wasn' t a bird, but later mixed in with many other holy birds to become the way it looks today; it's also known as the phoenix."

"Oh!"

Phoenixes he knew about it, the immortal bird in myths that could be reborn in fire.

"Because those two just had to add a phoenix."

Hearing their conversation, Isaac and Miria danced as they cut in,

"Isn't it exactly the same as dominos? No matter how many times you push them down you can stack them up again."

"Yeah, compared to the phoenix rising from the ashes, dominos revive much more beautifully, you know!"

"Yup yup!"

Firo originally didn't intend to listen to them seriously, but then he felt a prickle of unease at those two's words.

"Can't be, you… still want to play again? To knock down an even larger one than this?"

"It's only natural, ain't it?"

"Because that's the duty of the people who knock down dominos!"

Hearing the two's innocent decision, Firo collapsed on top of the counter, clutching his head.

"Spare me!"

--- Phoenix!

Listening to Firo and the other's chatter, Maiza muttered to himself satirically.

---Surpassing death countless times, reviving stronger each time . Humans are like that.

Although also immortal, us 'immortals' are just like an unnatural existence.

---To draw a parallel to a similar myth, we just like the Tower of Babel. We reach heights even bird can't conquer, and everything's over when we collapse.

"Compared to us, normal humans are by far much closer to God than us. Don't you think so, Begg?"

Swirling the wine in the glass, Maiza spoke quietly to his absent friend, Begg.

3 January 1932 DD Newspaper Agency

"First is about Gustavo's sneak raid, which we learned from the captive of Tick of the Gandor Family. During the information exchange, I told Keith about how to contact Baltoro, although I don 't know what bargain was struck after Keith and Baltoro got in touch with each other. Then, we told Miss Edith about Keith's battle plan, as 'the way to save Roy'. Since we were already involved in this war, we had no choice but to do some business behind Keith and the other's backs."

The person sitting behind the mountain of information summed up the situation very happily. <--! speech marks disappear here…-->

Concerning the incident this time, it was “Gustavo, under the influence of drugs, went on a rampage in the news agency when he read the article on the dangers of the drugs he and his men were distributing”. This was the take on the incident forced onto the police.

There was no need to create false evidence: it was sufficient to just place that black case from before by Gustavo’s side. Once the police investigated the drugs within, they would probably make the drugs distributed by the Runoratas illegal. The violence and destruction of property did happen, so things would proceed smoothly on the legal front as well. The government too was fond of fabricating stories. So as long as it seemed to be true, there was no problem. That is how it judges the situation.

“Well, the most important thing is that everyone’s safe. Gustavo will go straight from hospital to jail, so with that, the incident will be more or less over, don’t you think?”

Nicholas and Elean exchanged looks, as though they still had some questions.

“Um, Director?”

“What is it?”

“The police arrived much later than we had anticipated.”

In fact, by the time the police arrived it was already a full thirty minutes after the incident had concluded. As a result, there was enough time to carry away the injured and set up the incriminating evidence.

"Aah, that's- yes yes, there was that too, wasn't there."

The person sitting behind the huge heap of information said in careless tones,

"This is classified information, however! Yesterday was the inquiry of the terrorist, Huey Laforet. Today, he was escorted away from Manhattan in highest secrecy. Anyhow, that train robbery that was aimed at rescuing this man— remember, the Flying Pussyfoot incident earlier? Some colleagues of his were plotting such things, so as preparation against attacks by the remaining terrorists, nearly all idle police officers were assigned to guard the surrounding area. It's probably because of this that they were late."

Elean directed another question at the blandly-speaking master of the documents he was facing.

"How to put it? See, it's this- we're talking about the time when we taking refuge outside. While that Gustavo guy was rampaging so very loudly and flashily and brazenly, just where on earth were you, Boss?"

A trace of laughter could be felt from the voice answering this question from behind the pile of documents.

"I was been here all along?"

"Huh?"

"Sorry?"

"Weeell, it's a real surprise I wasn't discovered. Thanks to these speaking tubes, I could hear what was said in every part of this office."

For a moment, the astonished two had the impression that they could see the delighted smile of the manager of the documents. Then, the Director brought this report meeting to a close with words that were unfitting for an information trader.

"No matter what, it's the best being able to collect information with your own eyes and ears. There is no such thing as [demon] (T/N:(Kanji: omnipotent person)) in this world. No matter how much knowledge you possess, in the end, you can trust only your own thoughts and experiences. That's how things are."

A few days later

On this day, the director, Nicolas and the others were absent, leaving Henry the only person on duty in the agency.

--- I risked my life in exchange for this information, so I must be the one to report it. I can speak with more authority about it, moreso than even the Director. Because I had directly come into with many kinds of people, undergone many experiences. As a price, I had also lost many things, but this can't be helped.

Information is power, so it's natural to have to pay a certain price in exchange for obtaining it. My thoughts about this still haven't changed.

---But I will no longer get too full of myself.

-

Henry didn't notice that the hair on his temples were greying; he kept thinking to share the 'information' he had paid a price for with someone, but he had never been able to.

At this moment, a client entered.

A young man with a tattoo on his face. His foot seemed to be injured; it was wrapped in bandages, and he was holding a crutch.

Crushed by the intense atmosphere of the editorial department, he didn't do anything except cry.

"You must have come a long way. Welcome to the The Informer ."

This young man seemed a little baffled by his courteous greeting, and said something Henry had long been anticipating.

"Uh, um, I came to talk about the train robbery that happened on a train a few days ago."

-

And even today, information races through the streets.

Those who use information and those who are manipulated by information.

Whether it is to trick or be tricked, to prosper or to destroy. They fight for information.

As though mocking their efforts, the aimless power gradually builds up, piling up higher and wider.

Looking to grow further, or planning to fall and collapse.

Repeatedly advancing and retreating, living on forever.

Information---- ever living, ever dying.

Epilogue

The Runorata Family

New Jersey Outskirts of New York

"And?"

A clear blue that almost seemed transparent. Under the freezing sky coloured in this shade, a single elderly man stood alone on the lawn. Behind him was a young man. Gustavo's underling, the man who normally was in charge of reporting about the state of things.

"Yes, sir. Gustavo miraculously pulled through it. We do not know what weapon was used, but his carotid artery was split open . The bullets in his body are the result of self-defense by the employees. Concerning the wound on his throat, it's said to be self-inflicted in a moment of insanity."

The underling made his report without even a speck of nervousness to his real boss behind the scenes---------- Bartolo.

As if he was a completely different person from before, when he cowered in terror before Gustavo.

"In addition, the police are also charging him for being the prime suspect for the Genoard murders, and it's only a matter of time before he is taken into custody. We have already made the necessary arrangements. The government has said that it would be in our best interests not to interfere beyond this with regards to matters concerning Gustavo."

"Is that so."

Bartolo gave a small nod of the head, muttered to himself while regarding the sky,

"Well, I suppose one could say that fellow is fortunate."

"I beg your pardon?"

"At the Council with other organizations, they had demanded that I handed him over. He has done some mighty fine things in the past, so they want to him to take responsibility for what his action."

As though he were discussing business matters, he tonelessly drew his conclusions.

"It would be ideal if that fellow had managed to get his hands on the Gandor Family territory, because I had agreed with the Five Families that once we had it we would transfer it to them."

"And, if he were to fail I was to hand him over."

"Although he failed in the end, they can't act since he's on this territory. To Gustavo, this is a truly lucky state of affairs. However, in exchange, I must give up part of my profits."

Bartolo paused here for a moment, before giving a bland smile while idly complaining to his underling,

"Times have changed dramatically. Whether it's for killing a traitorous underling or for taking revenge for your brothers, it's a era where you need the recognition of the Council or the Commission.

After the revolution drenched in Luciano's blood, the Mafia world rapidly progressed towards modernizing the organizations. Ties with politicians were gradually strengthened, and even hostilities towards the Jewish and Irish Mobs mellowed.

The Runorata Family plodding on operating their own business little changed in the wake of this wave of modernization. However , this did not mean they wanted to antagonist the others- they chose to walk the path of 'co-existence' the same way as the other organizations. It was only Bartolo alone who pressed on, intent on having his own way.

"Lucky Luciano was a powerful man. But he didn't preside over his own organization, but changed it into a parliamental style of running, similar to the government. Because he understood that, if he were to be the central figure in the organization, it was likely that the next person to be attacked would be him. In that case, anyone could become the leader. Aah, that fellow ruled the world, at least for a short period of time."

Unconsciously glancing at his underling, a hint of expression appeared on Bartolo's face.

"Perhaps now is the harshest era, for both us and the Gandors. Will we be able to prevail over each other? I really look forward to this."

The underling was a little surprised by these words.

"Then, the Gandor Family?"

"We have already signed a truce. From now on we will be equals. Not as enemies, but to coexist."

"Are we leaving it there? Then what's with this kind of small organization having a relationship with that assassin called 'Vino'. "

"You simply don't get it!"

In an instant, Bartolo resumed his icy expression, and gazed silently at his underling through his glasses.

"Our world is either 1 or 0. Are they existences equal to enemies ? Or are they existences that cannot be permitted? It's a case of two-choose-one. The word 'weak' simply doesn't exist in our world, and we absolutely cannot regard opponents as weaker as ourselves. And, it all begins in that instant… Gustavo and my thoughts about this are the same. It's just, I regard them as 1, and that fellow regards them as 0. That's the only difference."

At this point, Bartolo waves at the corner of his villa; his young grandson was just running over in their direction.

"When my grandson grows up, will the Gandors be enemies or neighbours? I really look forward to that day."

Bartolo walked forward and, finally, revealed the complicated emotions about the man with whom he was negotiating earlier.

"Keith Gandor, hm? What an impressive man."

The Gandor Family

5 January 1932

Kacha

Keith silently hung up the phone and pulled on his coat in preparation for going home. It had already been a week since he last went back, so there was some excitement in his heart.

"Mrs. Kate is still well?"

A hint of a smile mixed in with his cold expression, Keith gave a light nod of his head and left the room.

---But man, Big Bro sure talked a lot on the phone.

Berga also didn't know if Keith was aware of what he thought, but in any case Keith remained silent as always. Or that was to say, he was as stingy as ever with his words.

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The Gandor Family office. They had already returned to the peaceful, routine work of the old days, and only Luck alone had many matters weighing on his mind as he lay on the sofa.

"I'm so bored…"

Indeed, when isolating Gustavo, he had said 'we refuse nobody' .

Although he was just saying that.

"You can't, *amigo*! You can't use scissors to cut vegetables!"

"Eh--- But it tastes good. That's right, what does 'amigo' mean? "

"It means friend!"

"Oh wow, this is the first time a girl's called me a friend."

In the kitchen of the office, Tick and the Mexican girl were innocently chatting and laughing.

The first time the Mexican girl came to the Gandor Family office , all their men wore identical expressions of shock.

"Um, Mr. Luck, that girl…"

"Please don't mind."

"But…"

"Even if you do mind, please pretend you don't mind."

"Huh?"

Watching out of the corner of his eye his underlings, who all seemed unwilling to leave, Luck sighed again.

---Keith-bro. Even though Tick alone is enough to fill our quota of craziness. I mean, I even had my hand cut off by that guy.

Ah well, I'll live. Things become tolerable when I bear in mind that the number of skillful fellows around have increased.

Claire, who had been muttering 'I exercised too much on the train…', had disappeared off to someplace. Probably to look for the person he was marrying. He's always had a will of his own.

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But the person who had been more impulsive, more idle than anyone else—-- it was, without question, himself.

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Luck stared up at the sky and sighed, musing over the events after that incident.

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"Miss! M-M- Miss! My sincere apologies! Because of a mistake on this Benjamin's part, I allowed Miss to become involved in such a frightful incident."

Eve didn't let them continue apologising.

"Mr. Benjamin, Ms. Samasa, I, I---"

Feeling two raps to her head, Eve looked up to see Samasa smiling.

"Y'ain't hafta worry, everythin's dun!"

Just as Eve was about to leave, Luck slowly walked towards her .

"Ah…"

Eve couldn't speak. Her brother's enemy, who, despite all those wilful words she had said, despite all those wilful things she did- who, inspite of all that, still saved her.

If she had fired the gun just like that, she would probably never see Benjamin and Samasa again.

Although she had been saved by that person so many times in that room, in the end she never once said a word of thanks.

Even so, she still wanted to rescue Dallas in the depths of her heart.

What kind of behaviour was appropriate when speaking to him ?

Then, he handed Eve a piece of paper and said,

“When you feel my pain has disappeared, please do as you wish. I shall leave this judgement of when this time has come to you.”

With that, the fox-eyed man turned to leave.

Drawn on the paper was a detailed map, and there was even a mark at the center of the river.

“Um! Mr. Luck!”

A hand was suddenly thrust in front of Eve, cutting her off.

“Don’t say anything. Whether it’s to curse me or thank me, because that will only make me angry.”

Watching Luck’s receding back, Eve just clutched that piece of paper to her chest.

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If that was exposed, the next person to be sunk in the river by his brothers would be himself.

And prior to that, how could he ever explain himself to his deceased companions!

If it were Firo, he would definitely say nary a care in the world, ‘They’re dead, so there’s no need for explanations, is there’. In this one aspect, Firo was colder than he was.

But he couldn’t do that. Although people in this field are all aware that they can die anytime, reality differs greatly from novels and movies. No one wants to die. In this respect, they and all the common folk were the same.

If he had to point out the difference between them, it could only be one thing. They were villains. That was all.

---*Yes, villains.*

Which was why he did not forgive Dallas and his cohorts, and why he he did not show Eve any sympathy.

That act was nothing more than just one of the 'calculations' he was proud of.

---After all, it's impossible for her. While she may know their location, she can't possibly haul them out.

Dallas and the others were sunk in the deepest part of the nearby river. It was possible to search the depths with heavy machinery, but with just Eve’s power alone that was absolutely impossible.

He just wanted to let that girl ‘be temporarily at ease’, that was all. If he told her the location, she would no longer contact himself and his gang. There wouldn't be any more reason for her to bear

such pointless hatred against him. And despite that, Dallas and the others would continue serving for their sins on the riverbed.

Everything was in control. There was nothing worth worrying about.

Although he thought that way, Luck couldn't get rid of the feeling that he was 'idle'.

If he really didn't want to let Dallas and the others off the hook, then he could have just created a false address. But why did he have to give Eve the chance to save Dallas and his cohorts? Why didn't he lie to Eve? These issues kept nagging Luck.

Claire was right: perhaps he simply wasn't suited to being Mafia. But now, his hands were already too filthy. Furthermore, protecting this land was his mission and duty. This estate was the best representation of family honor.

In other words, it boiled down to this, and nothing else.

This, was probably his entire world.

---Could it be.

Luck thought back to the time when he was facing off Gustavo, to the girl's face then. The look in those eyes was one he wasn't capable of expressing. The look of someone who threw themselves wholeheartedly into a world they believed it, the look of someone who was filled with a certain type of readiness.

---Could it be, this is what I envied? That child and her heart brimming with passion. Something I probably can never attain no matter what I do.

Because he no longer possessed the capacity to prepare himself for death. Not ever, not for all time.

Turning these thoughts over in his mind, Luck quietly immersed himself in a book.

The Wealthy

“Hey, let's do this again sometime tomorrow?”

“Next time, Firo join us too!”

Several large wine barrels were placed in the Alveare. No longer used to store wine, it was now packed with dominos.

Sitting on the wine barrels, Isaac and Miria were drumming their two feet against the barrels.

“I refuse.”

Firo snapped and sighed as he asked the two,

“Hey, I’ll ask again… What's so fun about this? Knocking down in a few minutes things that took several hours to place.”

Hearing this, Isaac and Miria grinned like kids as they said,

"But watching it is very fun, yeah?"

"Fun, isn't it?"

"……Yeah."

Firo agreed with them on this point. Although it looked tragically stupid, he too forgot to eat and had focussed on watching when the dominos started falling.

"It's so much fun! Of course, we're happy too when the dominos we placed fall…"

"The people watching are happy too, it's really killing two birds with one stone!"

"In other words, we can earn a lot of money!"

"If us and the people watching are happy, then all the people in the city happy too!"

Confronted with this genuinely delighted duo, Firo gave a smile of surrender.

"True... This is exactly the kind of game that'll come from you two with that kind of reasoning."

---Your lives are like that too.

Although Firo thought that, he didn't say it aloud.

---This pair's lives are just like the 'central trunk' of the dominos . Moving independently, passing through various mechanisms, knocking down forking dominos. Ennis's life and mine are the same; these two always impact on other people's lives. But they're actually just living by doing whatever they want.

"I understand. Next time I'll help too. If I have the time."

"That's great! Now Firo's also a domino buddy!"

"A dominist! Which one is better?"

"…Please tell me what's the difference between the two."

Firo held his head and thought,

If there were more people like them, the world would probably become peaceful and harmonious. But while the number of people who have been influenced by this couple will be many, no one would probably want to 'become those two'.

---I'm thinking too much.

As Firo smiled wryly at his own fantasies, he laid out the dominos from the bucket on his palm.

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In the Genoard family villa, Eve was sprawled on the dining table.

While holding the piece of paper in her hand, she thinking about her older brother and Luck, as well as pondering over matters silently.

--I'll save Brother Dallas just like that? Is it really right to do so?

This was her original wish, but why now was she shaken?

Could it be, her selfishness had been delivered a massive blow by that person?

But her determination to save her brother hadn't changed.

What should I do, what should I do? I, I---

"Why you so little energy neh? Quickly eat some food lah, then get energy!"

Eve turned her eyes towards the lively voice, to see the Asian-looking chef walking over with some dishes in hand.

"Even though I dunno what you have on your mind, why not eat first ah. People ah, they most happy when eating."

"Don't say such naive things so irresponsibly."

Jon, standing at the side, suddenly interjected.

Eve, who originally had no appetite, smelled the fragrance of food and unconsciously picked up fork and knife.

"---Delicious. Just like what Mrs. Kate cooked."

"Kate? Who's Kate?"

Fan seemed baffled, turning to the seemingly overjoyed steward and Samasa.

Eve, who had been frowning all along, finally regained her former smiles, and the two delighted over this as though they were happy for themelves.

Looking at the people around her, Eve once again sensed how fortunate she was. But, her older brother and father were no longer here. That was a fact. Even if one mourned the deceased there was nothing one could do. But, Dallas was indeed still alive.

What should I do? Eve pondered as she ate.

What should I do? How could I let Dallas and Luck, and also the Gandor people gain happiness?

--Aah, I, I only thought of my happiness.

The only goal she had been thinking about was to immediately rescue Dallas.

If she kept thinking about it, she could at least decide what she was able to do.

That's it, I--- I want to become like those two.

I want to be like the two thieves who brought me happiness for a time, to think about what I could do over people other than myself. Then, to absolutely not get confused when I act. To put others before myself, not ever let happiness escape again.

Eve thought about the thief-couple, and her anxieties slowly melted away.

As though wanting to confirm her way of thinking, she tightly, tightly held that piece of paper.

Begg

August 2002 Somewhere in New Jersey

"Begg."

Maiza called this name he hadn't said in decades, but the other party had no response whatsoever.

In a room of a certain hospital, Begg was just huddled up in the corner of the room. He seemed to be muttering something by himself, completely indifferent to everything around him.

"It appears he started being like that a few decades ago… About thirty years ago, since Mr. Bartolo Runorata passed away in old age, he's been in that state. Don't you know? That he was a very famous Mafia in this area."

"I've only heard of his name."

Bartolo Runorata. Although Maiza had never met him in person before, he knew that he was a very famous person in the same line of business. Begg's master, and also the only other person he trusted outside of 'old friends'.

The last time Maiza had seen Begg was when Bartolo was still the boss of the organization. Some unknown events had happened back then and Begg suddenly lost all vigor, concocting new drugs as per Bartolo's request with an expression of utter despair about this world ever since.

Seeing Begg's peerless loyalty towards his master, he had worried a great deal about what would happen to him after Bartolo's death---

"Do you still recognize me, Begg?"

Maiza once again called out at Begg, but his eyes still didn't look in his direction.

Seeing the nurse give him a thoughtful look-over, Maiza asked without minding the stare,

"Who pays for the medical fees?"

"National charities. Ah, while Mr. Genoard was alive he would frequently donate money. But drug therapy has its limits, and it doesn't seem to have any effect on him."

"I see…"

Other than that, Maiza didn't ask further questions, his gaze travelling back to the man at the centre of the room.

"He's always like that. No matter what he doesn't respond… But, may I ask what is your relationship with this patient?"

"An old friend."

"……"

The nurse didn't say anything. This person had lived without eating or drinking for decades; he said he was an old friend, yet no matter how one looked this man appeared to be around only thirty . About this patient, the FBI had already ordered saying 'don't care about him'. Just who was this man?

The nurse was very puzzled, but didn't ask anything.

Maiza entered the room and Begg still didn't respond.

"Nowadays, compared to yours, more powerful drugs have been discovered. Drugs that make people fortunate, and also drugs that make people unfortunate."

Maiza reminisced the past as he sat next to Begg.

"Nowadays, in alleyways, there's a type of drug with tens of times the side-effects of the drugs you blended. Even though they knew there was 80 percentage chance of death, many people still take it. ---Humans, are truly unimaginable creatures."

Then, Maiza called countless times to no avail. Afterwards, Maiza spoke of many, many things, but there was still no light in those eyes.

"Begg……"

Maiza slowly lifted his right hand and gently reached over to Begg's forehead.

If you were to be forever lost in darkness, why not---

In that instant his palm was about to rest on the forehead, a few familiar words came from Begg's mouth.

"……Czes, your side…… the hull…… look…… look quick…… This boat…… is going to America……"

Hearing these fragmented words, Maiza silently lowered his right hand.

Begg had already returned to his happiness times. A time when he together with a child aboard the same ship as he was, discussing the exploration of the inside of the ship.

"I'll still come."

Maiza slowly stood up in preparation to leave, when Begg suddenly uttered some syllables.

"Thank, you, Maiza, for, not, eat, ing, me."

The nurse looked up startedly, then Begg lapsed back into his normal state.

---Seems he wasn't angry.

Maiza donned his hat, gave a nod, and walked out of the hospital.

"How was it?"

At the back, a child in his early teens was waiting for him.

"Oh, nothing. He looks a little tired- he's bound to recover someday."

As he spoke, Maiza slipped into the driver's seat of the car.

"Someday, for sure---"

Maiza didn't continue, and started the car with the youth inside . They drove towards the place they hadn't returned to in decades, New York.

The Drug Addict

A day in January, 1932

Aah, feels wonderful. Amazing.

But other than that, there's still something.

Something missing. What was it. I had to remember it.

There was nothing here. Everything was focused in my brain.

Before my eyes, everything had merged together. The skyforeststreetsdaynight all merged together into one entity. This was reality. My fingers too had merged, wrists, feet, waist, head, chest, bones, heart, everything had merged into one point, all my vision was focused on myself. My body encompassed the whole world.

Then, my eyeballs too started merging. Aah, I could see every corner of the world.

But, that time, what shape was the world?

Other than the eyeballs that had merged into the world, I wanted to see the outside world.

I already had completely merged with the world. In other words, the world was me.

Then, I knew everything about this world.

Here, there was no one other than me.

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"……R-, Roy……"

>

Who was calling?

Who. It didn't matter who. I didn't want to see them. I was right , right here. Aah, my world started collapsing. Like it was grabbing at my eyeballs, like many pairs of hands were chasing me. Stop it, don't surround me. Aah, voice, my voice is becoming distant. Stopstopstop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop stop--- stop, you bastard!

>

"Roy……Roy…"

>

My body was thrown into the deep, deep ocean. It was a world without chaos, without dust, a completely black world. If I didn' t float up it'd be bad. I'd drown. Getting closer and closer to the shining surface, the entire world shone with a bright light. The skyearth streets,day, night, all appeared familiarly before my eyes. My memories under the rays of the light slowly became fresh, my consciousness on the surface of the water frantically parted water and swum towards the voice.

>

"Roy!"

>

Then, my body finally broke through the surface. <--!lit: then, my body finally floated to the surface-->

>

<==>

>

When he awoke, Roy found himself lying in a hospital.

“Wonderful! You’re finally awake!”

“Edith.”

Looking at the surroundings, it was a familiar hospital. It was Fred’s hospital in the West Village. When he had hurt his head seriously in the past, he had been taken to this place. Although recently it had stopped business because of its distant location, it had opened again at some unknown time.

Lying beside him on his bed was an old man whose entire body gave off the smell of alcohol, a man whose feet and face were wrapped in bandages.

“You seem to mind a lot!”

The doctor covered in grey clothes from head to toe said. That’s right, it was Fred. Standing at his side seemed to be a helper- when had he been hired?

"You'd come here every time you took drugs. Originally this place wasn't a hospital specialised in drug overdose, but when it's you, you'll be sent here only when you were heavily injured."

Then, the helper-like man began inspecting Roy's right hand, swathed in bandages, with some tools. He didn't scold or lecture him, a junkie, and when he had finished the treatment he immediately left the room. This doctor was always like that.

Looking to the side, he saw Edith staring back at him, as though wanting to say something.

"Thank you, Edith. I was really wrong."

Before he was yelled at by Edith for being an idiot, he had best apologise first.

"It's great… I thought you wouldn't wake up! It's great!"

She didn't call him an idiot. It was a little abnormal.

Then, the two didn't know what to say next. After continued silence for the better part of half a day, finally, Edith seemed to remember something, and shattered the deadlock.

"Ah…… right, right, the truck."

---Truck? …… Aah, I remembered. The truck I stole and drove when snatching away the Runorata Family's drugs. Yeah, no matter what, I was going going to be hauled away by the police.

A wave of powerlessness washed over me from my lower abdomen. But I had done it, this was a fact.

Then, Edith chuckled.

"Relax. I've already settled it."

"Eh?"

"Mr. Gandor has already offered compensation to the owner. That's to say it's been solved without going through the police."

"Solved… Paid compensation for me…"

The next moment, Edith said something totally unexpected.

"Of course, this is lent to you! Mr. Gandor--- lent it to you!"

"Huh? Eh? Eh? Eh?"

"The interest is very high, so you need to work hard to pay it back. Mr. Gandor's high interest is very famous in the 'territory'!"

At this point, Edith smiled gently and touched Roy's face.

"You need to atone for your own sins. Because I'm your guarantor, so I'll give you a little help. After Mr. Gandor has arranged work for you, you must work hard, okay? Also, don't forget to apologise with the truck owner."

---Oh no!

He originally thought he had escaped from the Grim Reaper of the Runorata Family, but he never though his throat would once again be gripped in the jaws of the Gandor Family hyena. He could no longer escape, but if he took drugs again he'd definitely be killed by the Gandor Family. He had better work seriously. He must not escape again.

Seeing Edith's expression, she seemed to know everything. It was like he was trapped in the palm of her hand. After this, he probably could never raise his head before Edith for the rest of his life. That kind of feeling. But even this didn't matter, he would only think that now. Only now.

…But there was a feeling that something was stange. Like something was missing.

Could it be, could it be I was still dreaming?

He glancing at Edith, who seemed to want to say something, then he realised she didn't seem the same as before.

"Your hair, you cut it?"

"You noticed it too late--- idiot."

Only after hearing this did he feel he had really woken up.

"It suits you. Yeah, very well."

He felt very happy.

Coda

後奏曲

The sun slowly sets over Manhattan. In the corner of Hell's Kitchen, a muffled melody plays. The music performed by the organist seemed to be celebrating someone's happiness. As though a story was drawing to a close, and, a new story was beginning. It played in the grey city, slowly flowing, seeping through. No matter when, no matter where---